FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS AND THEIR FRIENDS

MARGARET SIDNEY

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MARGARET SIDNEY

A LITTLE MAID OF CONCORD TOWN
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THE FAMOUS PEPPER BOOKS

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OUR DAVIE PEPPER

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON

"What are you doing, Phronsie, sitting down in the middle of the stairs?"—(*See page 46.*)

FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS AND THEIR FRIENDS

By

MARGARET SIDNEY

AUTHOR OF "FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS ABROAD," "A LITTLE MAID OF CONCORD TOWN," "SALLY, MRS. TUBBS," ETC.

Illustrated by

Eugenie M. Wireman

BOSTON

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PEPPER
TRADE-MARK
Registered in U. S. Patent Office.

To my daughter Margaret,
who to her friends embodies
"Polly Pepper" in her
girlhood, I dedicate most
lovingly this book.

PREFACE.

THERE were so many interesting friends of the Five Little Peppers, whose lives were only the faintest of outlines in the series ending when Phronsie was grown up, that a volume devoted to this outer circle has been written to meet the persistent demand.

Herein the author records many happenings that long ago Ben and Polly, Joel and David told her. And even Phronsie whispered some of it confidentially into the listening ear. "Tell about Rachel, please," she begged; and Margaret Sidney promised to write it all down some day.

And that day seems to have arrived in which it all should be recorded and the promise fulfilled. For the Five Little Peppers loved their friends very dearly, and were loyal and true to them. And hand in hand, the circle widening ever, they lived and loved as this history records.

MARGARET SIDNEY.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Five-O'clock Tea	9
II.	Phronsie	31
III.	Clem Forsythe	45
IV.	Miss Taylor's Working Bee	58
V.	"She's My Little Girl"	80
VI.	Grandma Bascom	97
VII.	The Disappointment	115
VIII.	The Garden Party	135
IX.	The Ten-Dollar Bill	153
X.	Trouble for Joel	166
XI.	Rachel	179
XII.	Doings at the Parsonage	198
XIII.	"She's Going to Stay Here Forever"	215
XIV.	"Can't Go," Said Joel	229
XV.	Up in Alexia's Pretty Room	242
XVI.	The Accident	255
XVII.	Joel's Adventure	266
XVIII.	The Comfort Committee	278

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	Joel's New Friend	293
XX.	The Cooking Club	305
XXI.	Of Many Things in General . .	320
XXII.	Rachel's Visit to Miss Parrott . .	337
XXIII.	The Old Parrott Homestead . .	350
XXIV.	Rachel's Future	372
XXV.	Jack Parish	394
XXVI.	Mr. Hamilton Dyce a True Friend .	413
XXVII.	A Piece of Good News . . .	431
XXVIII.	The Little Stone Cupboard . .	450

ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE

"What are you doing, Phronsie, sitting down in the middle of the stairs?" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

Five-o'clock Tea 25

"But this is ten dollars," said Joel 149

"Oh, Larry," said Miss Taylor gently, bending over him 259

"Yes, sir," called Joel back, from the alcove . . . 263

The unlucky oar was seized by the triumphant crew 270

"I used to play with it," she said softly 351

He stood in the middle of the little shop 401

Five Little Peppers and Their Friends

I A FIVE-O'CLOCK TEA

"I WISH," said Phronsie slowly, "that you'd come in, little girl."

"Can't." The girl at the gate peered through the iron railings, pressing her nose quite flat, to give the sharp, restless, black eyes the best chance.

"Please do," begged Phronsie, coming up quite close; "I very much wish you would."

"Can't," repeated the girl on the outside. "Cop won't let me."

"Who?" asked Phronsie, much puzzled and beginning to look frightened.

"Perlice." The girl nodded briefly, taking her face away from the iron railings enough to accomplish that ceremony. Then she plastered her nose up against its support again, and stared at Phronsie with all her might.

"Oh," said Phronsie, with a little laugh that chased away her fright, "there isn't any big policeman here. This is Grandpapa's garden."

"'Tain't, it's the perliceman's; everything's the perliceman's," contradicted the girl, snapping one set of grimy fingers defiantly.

"Oh, no," said Phronsie, softly but very decidedly, "this is my dear Grandpapa's home, and the big policeman can't get in here, ever."

"Oh, you ninny!" The girl staring at her through the railings stopped a minute to laugh, covering both hands over her mouth to smother the sound. "The perlice can go everywheres they want to. I guess some of 'em 's in heaven now, spyin' round."

Phronsie dropped the doll she was carrying close to her bosom, to concentrate all her gaze up toward the sky, in wide-eyed amazement that allowed her no opportunity to carry on the conversation.

"An' I couldn't no more get into this 'ere garden than I could into heaven," the girl on the outside said at last, to bring back the blue eyes to earth, "so don't you think it, you. But, oh, my, don't I wish I could, though!"

There was so much longing in the voice that

Phronsie brought her gaze down from the policemen in their heavenly work to the eyes staring at her. And she clasped her hands together tightly, and hurried up to lay her face against the big iron gate and close to that of the girl.

"He won't hurt you, the big policeman won't," she whispered softly. "I'll take hold of your hand, and tell him how it is, if he gets in. Come."

"Can't," the girl was going to say, but her gaze rested upon the doll lying on the grass where it fell from Phronsie's hand. "Lawks! may I just have one good squint at that?" she burst out.

"You may hold it," said Phronsie, bobbing her head till her yellow hair fell over her flushed cheeks.

The gate flew open suddenly, nearly overthrowing her; and the girl, mostly all legs and arms, dashed through, picking up the doll to squeeze it to her neck so tightly that Phronsie rushed up, quite alarmed.

"Oh, don't," she cried, "you'll frighten her. I'll tell her how it is, and then she'll like you."

"I'll make her like me," said the girl, with savage thrusts at the doll, and kissing it all over.

"Oh, my, ain't you sweet!" and she cuddled it fiercely in her scrawny neck, her tangled black hair falling around its face.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Phronsie, standing quite still, "she's my child, and she's dreadfully frightened. Oh, please, little girl, don't do so."

"She's been your child forever, and I've never had a child." The girl raised her black head to look sternly at Phronsie. "I'll give her back; but she's mine now."

"Haven't you ever had a child?" asked Phronsie, suddenly, two or three tears trailing off her round cheeks to drop in the grass, and she drew a long breath and winked very fast to keep the others back.

"Not a smitch of one," declared the other girl decidedly, "an' I'm a-goin' to hold this one, and pretend I'm its mother."

Phronsie drew a long breath, and drew slowly near.

"You may," she said at last.

The new mother didn't hear, being hungrily engaged in smoothing her child's cheeks against her own dirty ones, first one side of the face and then the other, and twitching down the dainty pink gown, gone awry during the hugging proc-

ess, and alternately scolding and patting the little figure. This done, she administered a smart slap, plunged over to the nearest tree, and set the doll with a thud on the grass to rest against its trunk.

"Sit up like a lady," she commanded.

"Oh, don't!" cried Phronsie, quite horror-stricken, and running over on distressed feet. "She's my child," she gasped.

"No, she's mine, an' I'm teachin' her manners. I ain't through pretendin' yet," said the girl. She put out a long arm and held Phronsie back.

"But you struck her." Phronsie lifted a pale face, and her blue eyes flashed very much as Polly's brown ones did on occasion.

The new mother whirled around and stared at her.

"Why, I had to, just the same as you're licked when you're bad," she said, in astonishment.

"What's 'licked'?" asked Phronsie, overcome with curiosity, yet keeping her eyes on her child, bolt upright against the tree.

"Why, whipped," said the girl, "just the same as you are when you're bad."

Phronsie drew a long breath.

"I've never been whipped," she said slowly.

"Oh, my Lord!" The girl tumbled down to the grass and rolled over and over, coming up suddenly to sit straight, wipe her tangled black hair out of her eyes, and stare at Phronsie. "Well, you are a reg'lar freak, you are," was all she could say.

"What's a 'freak'?" asked Phronsie, actually turning her back on her child to give all her attention to this absorbing conversation, with its most attractive vocabulary.

"It's—oh, Jumbo!" and over she flopped again, to roll and laugh. "Well, there!" and she jumped to her feet so quickly she nearly overthrew Phronsie, who had drawn closer, unable to miss a bit of this very strange proceeding. "Now I'm through pretendin', an' I haven't got any child, an' you may have her back." She wrung her grimy hands together, and turned her back on the object of so much attention. "Take her, quick; she's yours."

Phronsie hurried over to the doll, sitting up in pink loveliness against the tree, knelt down on the grass, and patted her with gentle hand, and smoothed down her curls. A curious sound broke in upon her work, and she looked up and listened. "I must go back," she whispered to

her child, and in a minute she was running around the figure of the girl, to stare into her face.

"Ow—get out!" cried the girl crossly, and she whirled off, pulling up her ragged dress to her face.

"I thought I heard you cry," said Phronsie in a troubled voice, and following her in distress.

"Phoo!" cried the girl, snapping her fingers in derision, and spinning around on the tips of her toes, "'twas the cat."

"No," said Phronsie decidedly, and shaking her head, "it couldn't be the cat, because she doesn't hardly ever cry, and besides she isn't here"—and she looked all around—"don't you see she isn't?"

"Well, then, 'twas that bird," said the girl, pointing up to a high branch. "Ain't you green, not to think of him!"

"I don't *think* it was the bird," said Phronsie slowly, and peering up anxiously, "and he doesn't cry again, so I 'most know he couldn't have cried then."

"Well, he will, if you wait long enough," said the girl defiantly.

"Chee, chee, chee," sang the bird, with delicious little trills, and shaking them out so fast his small throat seemed about to burst with its efforts.

"There, you see he couldn't cry," began Phronsie, in a burst of delight; "you see, little girl," and she hopped up and down in glee.

"He's got the 'sterics, an' he'll cry next, like enough," said the girl.

"What's 'the 'sterics'?" asked Phronsie, coming out of her glee, and drawing nearer. "Oh, I see some tears," and she looked soberly up into the thin, dirty face, and forgot all about her question.

"No, you don't, either." The girl twitched away angrily. "There ain't never no tears you could see on me; 'twas the cat or the bird. Ain't you green, though! You're green as that grass there," and she spun round and round, snapping her fingers all the while.

Phronsie stood quite still and regarded her sorrowfully.

"Don't you believe I cried!" screamed the girl, dashing up to her, to snap her fingers in Phronsie's face; "say you don't this minute."

"But I think you did," said Phronsie. "Oh,

I'm very sure you did, and you may hold my child again, if you only won't cry any more," and she clasped her hands tightly together. The other girl started and ran toward the big iron gate.

"Oh, don't!" Phronsie called after her, and ran to overtake the flying feet. "Please stay with me. I like you; don't go."

The girl threw her head back as if something hurt her throat, then leaned her face against the iron railings and stuck her fingers in her ears.

"Don't! lemme alone! go 'way, can't you!" She wriggled off from Phronsie's fingers. "I'll lick you if you don't lemme be!"

"I wish you'd play with me," said Phronsie, having hard work to keep out of the way of the flapping shoes all down at the heel, "and you may have Clorinda for your very own child as long as you stay—you may really."

"Ow! see here!" Up came the girl's face, and with a defiant sweep of her grimy hands she brushed both cheeks. "Do you mean that, honest true, black and blue?"

"Yes," said Phronsie, very much relieved to see the effect of her invitation, "I do mean it,

little girl. Come, and I'll tell Clorinda all how it is."

"I'm goin' outside to walk up and down a bit. Bring on your doll."

"But you must come here," said Phronsie, moving off slowly backward over the grass. "Come, little girl"—holding out her hand.

"Now I know you didn't mean it," said the girl scornfully. "You wouldn't let me touch that nasty old doll of yours again for nothin', you wouldn't," she shrilled at her.

"Oh, yes, I would," declared Phronsie, in great distress; "see, I'm going to get her now," and she turned around and hurried over the grass to pick Clorinda off from her resting-place and run back. "There, see, little girl," she cried breathlessly, thrusting the doll into the dirty hands; "take her now and we'll go and play."

For answer, the girl clutched the doll and sped wildly off through the gateway.

"Oh!" cried Phronsie, running after with pink cheeks and outstretched arms, "give me back my child; stop, little girl."

But there was no stop to the long, thin figure flying down the path on the other side of the tall hedge. It was a back passage, and few pedes-

trians used the path; in fact, there were none on it this afternoon, so the children had it all to themselves. And on they went, Phronsie, with but one thought—to rescue her child from the depths of woe such as being carried off by a strange mother would produce—blindly plunging after.

At last the girl with the doll stopped suddenly, flung herself up against a stone fence, and drew a long breath.

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" she cried defiantly, clutching the doll with a savage grip.

Phronsie, too far gone for words, sank panting down to the curbstone, to watch her with wild eyes.

"You said I might take her," the girl blurted out. "I hain't took nothin' but what you give me. I want to play with her to my home. You come with me, and then you can take her back with you."

"I can't," said Phronsie, in a faint little voice. Her cheeks were very red, and she wiped her hot face on her white apron. "You must give me Clorinda, and I must go home," and she held out a shaking hand.

But the girl danced off, and Phronsie, without a thought beyond the rescue of her child, stumbled on after her, scarcely seeing one step before her for the tears that, despite all her efforts, now began to stream down her round cheeks.

At last, in trying to turn out for a baker's boy with a big basket, she caught her foot and fell, a tired little heap, flat in a mud puddle in the middle of the brick pavement.

"My eye!" cried the baker's boy, lifting her up. "Here, you girl, your sister's fell, ker-squash!"

At this, the flying girl in front whirled suddenly and came running back, and took in the situation at once.

"Come on, you lazy thing, you!" she exclaimed; then she burst into a laugh. "Oh, how you look!"

"Give me back——" panted Phronsie, rubbing away the tears with her muddy hands, regardless of her splashed clothes and dirty shoes.

"Keep still, can't you?" cried the girl, gripping her arm, as two or three pedestrians paused to stare at the two. "Come on, sister," and she seized Phronsie's hand, and bore her off. But

on turning the corner, she stopped abruptly, and, still holding the doll closely, she dropped to one knee and wiped off the tears from the muddy little cheeks with a not ungentle hand. "You've got to be my sister," she said, in a gush, "else the hoodlums will tear you from neck to heels." And seizing Phronsie's hand again, she bore her off, dodging between rows of dwellings, that, if her companion could have seen, would have certainly proved to be quite novel. But Phronsie was by this time quite beyond noticing any of the details of her journey, and after turning a corner or two, she was hauled up several flights of rickety steps, strange to say without the usual accompaniment of staring eyes and comments of the various neighbors in the locality.

"There!" The girl, still clutching the doll, flung wide the rickety door. "My, ain't I glad to get here, though!" and she drew a long breath, releasing Phronsie's hand, who immediately slid to the floor in a collapsed little heap. "Well, this is my home—ain't it pretty, though!"

Phronsie, thus called on for a reply, tried very hard to answer, but the words wouldn't come.

"You needn't try," said the girl, slamming the

door, "'tain't likely you can praise it enough," and she broke out into a hard, sarcastic laugh, which shrilled its way out of the one window, whose broken glass was adorned with nondescript fillings.

"See here now, you're all beat out," she exclaimed suddenly; then rushing across the room, she dragged up a broken chair, and jammed it against the door. "There now, we're by ourselves, an' you can rest."

"I must go home," said Phronsie faintly, and holding up her tired arms. "Give me my child; I must go home."

"Did you think I didn't know what was proper?" cried the girl scornfully, and tossing her head. "I'm going to have five-o'clock tea 'fore you go. There, I'm a lady, an' a swell one, too, I'd have you know."

She ran over to the corner of the slatternly room, and set the doll on a bed, over which were tossed the clothes in a dirty heap, Phronsie following every movement with anxious eyes.

"Now she's my child, remember," she said, turning her sharp, black eyes on the small figure huddled up on the floor, "as long as she stays here."

Then she hurried about, twitching a box out here and there from a cupboard, whose broken door hung by one hinge.

"Here's my silver spoons—ain't they beautiful!" she cried, running up with a few two-tined forks and a bent and battered knife. These she placed, also the cracked cups, with great gusto, on the rickety table, propped for support against the wall, as one of its legs was gone entirely and another on the fair road to departure.

"'Tain't stylish to have yer table agin the wall," she broke out, "at a five-o'clock tea; I know, 'cause I've peeked in the windows up on the avenoo, an' I've seen your folks, too." She nodded over at Phronsie. "I know what I'll do." She tossed her head with its black, elfish locks, and darted off in triumph, dragging up from another corner a big box, first unceremoniously dumping out the various articles, such as dirty clothes, a tin pan or two, a skillet, an empty bottle—last of all, a nightcap, which she held aloft. "Gran's," she shouted; "it's been lost a mighty long time. Now I'm goin' to wear it to my five-o'clock tea. It's a picter hat, same 's that lady had on to your house once—I seen her."

She threw the old nightcap over her hair, tied the ragged strings with an air, and soon, by dint of pulling and hauling, had the table in the very center of the apartment, the box securely under its most delicate and unreliable portion.

"There—my! ain't we fine, though!" She surveyed her work with great delight, her hands on her hips. "Now, says I, for our ice cream an' cake, with white on top, an' choc'late."

She gave a flirt of her ragged gown and darted here and there with her elfish movements; and presently a cold potato, shivering in its skin, a slice or two of hard, moldy bread, and some turnips and carrots, uncooked, were set about the dirty table, with empty spools in between. "Them's the flowers," she explained, as she put the last-mentioned articles in their places. "Now it's all ready, except the choc'late." And waving an old tin coffeepot, whose nose was a thing of the past, she filled it at the faucet over the wooden sink, and put it down with a flourish at one end of the table. "Now we're ready, an' I'm the beautiful lady up to your house—I seen her, once when I was peekin' through the fence" —she nodded shrewdly, her little eyes snapping—"her an' your sister."

Five O'Clock Tea.

"Oh, I want Polly," broke out Phronsie, with such a wail, as she sat, a frozen little heap, not daring to stir, that the girl screamed out:

"Well, I'm goin' to take you to her, when I've given you my five-o'clock tea; that is, if you don't cry. An' I ain't goin' to be the beautiful lady up at your house; I'll be Mrs. somebody else. No, I'll be a Dukess—the Dukess of Marlbrer—I've seen her in the paper. Oh, you've got to have the best chair," and she dragged up the sole article of furniture of that name, minus its back, away from the door; then helping Phronsie up from the floor, she wiped off the tears on her pinafore, no longer white, and soon had her installed on it. "Now you're comp'ny." Thereupon she ran and fetched the doll from the bed, and put her on a small, old barrel, from which the articles were dumped out, and, with a box for her back, Clorinda was soon in great state on one side of the feast. The Dukess then slipped into her own seat, an inverted tub, somewhat low, to be sure, but still allowing the view of the festive cup to be seen. "She's my child, now. Will you have some choc'late?"—with a winning smile that ran all over her dirty face and wrinkled it up alarmingly.

"Oh, no, she's my child," protested Phronsie, the tears beginning again.

"I mean till I get through my five-o'clock tea," cried the girl; "can't you understand? Then she'll be yours, an' I'll take you home. Will you have choc'late?—you must, Lady—what's your name, anyway?" she demanded abruptly, bringing her black eyes to bear on Phronsie.

Phronsie could hardly stammer it out for the tears she was choking back.

"Oh, my eye, what a name!" laughed the Dukess, in derision. "Well, you can be Lady Funsie—Fornsie—whatever you call it. Now, will you have some choc'late? 'Tain't perlite not to answer."

"I'd rather have some milk," said Phronsie faintly, "if you please."

"Oh, 'tain't no trouble," said the Dukess airily, quirking out her little finger with grace; and poising the tin cofteepot with an elegant air, she inverted it over a cracked cup, which, when generously full of water, she passed to her guest. "Help yourself to th' cakes, Lady Fonsie," she said graciously, "an' what beyewtiful weather we are havin'!"

Phronsie put forth a trembling hand, as it

seemed to be expected of her, and took the cup of water, spilling about half of it, which ran off the table-edge and down her little brown gown, the Dukess greeting this mishap with a shout of laughter, checking it suddenly with a start and a dismayed glance in the direction of the broken window.

"It's time fer you to talk some," she said. "You should say, 'Yes, I think so, too.'"

"I think so, too," murmured Phronsie, viewing her cup of milk gravely.

"An' you must say, 'I think, Dukess, you have the most splendid milk.'"

"It isn't milk," said Phronsie gravely, and she turned serious eyes on the lady of quality opposite.

"Oh, yes, it is," said the Dukess, "an' you orter go on an' say, 'An' all them perfectly beyewtiful flowers, I never see any so fine!'"—pointing to the empty spools in between the eatables.

"But they aren't flowers," said Phronsie

sodden woman, in a dirty, green shawl and battered bonnet stood transfixed with amazement in the entrance. She hadn't a pleasant eye beneath her straggling, white hair, and her first words were not altogether agreeable nor appropriate at five-o'clock tea.

"So this is the way," she said gruffly, "when I sends you out, Rag, to pick up somethin', you eat me out o' house an' home with brats you bring in"; for she hadn't seen through the dirt on Phronsie's face and clothes what manner of child was present.

The Dukess twitched off the nightcap, and sprang up, upsetting the tin coffeepot, which rolled away by itself, and put herself over by Phronsie, covering her from view. In passing, she had grasped the doll off from the barrel and hidden her in the folds of her tattered gown with a quick, sharp thrust.

"'Tain't nothin' 'f I do have some fun once in a while, Gran," she grumbled. She pinched Phronsie's arm. "Keep still." And while the old woman swayed across the room, for she wasn't quite free from the effects of a taste from a bottle under her arm, which she couldn't resist trying before she reached home, Phronsie and

Rag were working their way over toward the door.

"Stop!" roared the old woman at them, in a fury, and she held up the nightcap. Involuntarily Rag paused, through sheer force of habit, and stood paralyzed, till her grandmother had come quite close.

"Hey, what have we got here?" She eyed Phronsie sharply. "Oh, well, you ain't acted so badly after all; maybe the pretty little lady has come to see me, hey?" and she seized Phronsie's small arm.

"Gran," cried Rag hoarsely, waking up from her unlucky paralysis, "let her go; only let her go, an' I'll—I'll do anythin' you want me to. I'll steal, an' pick an' fetch, and do anythin', Gran."

The old woman leered at her, and passed her hand to the beads on Phronsie's neck; and in doing so she let the little arm slip, that she might use both hands to undo the clasp the better. One second of time—but Rag, knowing quite well what could be done in it, seized Phronsie, rushed out-

neighbor's child—around a corner, darting here and there, till presently she set Phronsie down, and drew a long breath.

"Oh, my eye!" she panted, "but wasn't that a close shave, though!"

II PHRONSIE

"THERE now, here you are!" There was a little click in the girl's throat. Phronsie looked up.

"Yes, and your child, too." Clorinda and all her pink loveliness was thrust into her own little mother's arms, and the sharp, black eyes peered down upon the two. "I've brung you home, and you're on your own grassplot, same's you were." Still she stood in her tracks.

"I'm sorry I brung you to my house; but you've had a five-o'clock tea, and now you're home, an' got your child." Still she did not stir.

"Well, I've got to go. Say, don't you call no one, nor tell no one, till I've had time to shake my feet down street." She thrust out one flapping shoe, then the other, gave a scornful laugh, and brushed her hand across the sharp eyes. "Promise now, black and blue, 'I promise true, hope to die if I do'. Hurry up! Do you promise?" she cried sharply.

"Yes," said Phronsie, hugging Clorinda tightly.

"All right. Now for Gran!" She shut her teeth tightly and was off and through the big gateway.

"I've got my child," said Phronsie, putting up a sleepy hand to pat Clorinda's head, but it fell to her side, while her yellow hair slipped closer over her flushed cheek. She tried to say, "Clorinda, we've got home, and my foots are tired," swayed, held her child tighter to her bosom, and over she went in a heap, fast asleep before her head touched the soft grass.

Polly Pepper, hurrying home from Alexia's, ran in by the gateway, and down by a short cut over the grass, her feet keeping time to a merry air that had possessed her all the afternoon. "How fine," she cried to herself, "our garden party will be!—and we've gotten on splendidly with our fancy things this afternoon. It will be too perfectly elegant for——" the flying feet came to a standstill that nearly threw her over the sleeping figure, the doll tightly pressed to the dirty little pinafore and the flushed cheeks.

"Oh, my goodness me!" cried Polly, down on her knees. "Why, Phronsie, just look at your

pinafore!" But Phronsie had no idea of looking at anything, and still slept on.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Polly, in consternation, "whatever in the world has she been doing! Well, I must get her up to the house."

"Hullo!" It was Jasper's voice. Polly flew up to her feet and hulloed back. He took a short cut, with a good many flying leaps, across the grass. "Oh, Polly, I've been looking for you!"

"Just see there," cried Polly, pointing tragically to the little heap.

"Well, dear me!" said Jasper. "Why, Polly"—as his eyes fell on the soiled pinafore and the little face where the tears had made muddy streaks.

"I know it," said Polly. "Did you ever in all this world, Jasper! What do you suppose she has been doing?"

"Oh, making mud pies, perhaps," said Jasper, unwilling to worry Polly; "don't look so, Polly. Here, we'll carry her to the house."

"Lady-chair," said Polly, the worry dropping out of her eyes at the fun of carrying Phronsie in. But Phronsie was beyond the charms of "lady-chair" or "pick-a-back," her yellow head bobbing so dismally when they lifted her up, that

Jasper at last picked her up in his arms, and marched off with her.

"You bring the doll, Polly."

So Polly ran along by his side with Clorinda dangling by one arm.

Mother Fisher said never a word when she received her baby, but wisely soothed and washed and tucked her away in bed; and little Doctor Fisher, as soon as he got home, viewed her critically through his big spectacles, and said, "The child is all right. Let her sleep." Which she did, until every one of the household, creeping in and out, declared she could not possibly sleep any longer, and that they must wake her up. This last was from Polly.

"What do you suppose it is, Mamsie?" she asked, for about the fiftieth time, hanging over Phronsie's little bed.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Fisher, with firm lips. Polly must not be worried by unnecessary alarm, and really there seemed to be nothing amiss with Phronsie, who was sleeping peacefully, with calm little face and even breath. "It's the best thing for her to sleep till she's rested."

"But what could have tired her so?" said Polly, with a puzzled face.

"That's just what we can't find out now," said her mother, diving into her basket for another of Van's stockings. "Oh, here is the mate. When she wakes up, she'll tell us."

"Well, Joanna is going, isn't she, Mamsie?" asked Polly, deserting the little bed to fling herself down on the floor at Mrs. Fisher's feet, to watch the busy fingers.

"Yes, she is," said Mother Fisher decidedly.

"I'm so very glad of that," said Polly, with a sigh of relief, "because you know, Mamsie, she might go off again and leave Phronsie when she ought to be watching her."

"Say no more about it, Polly," said her mother, setting even, firm stitches, "for Mr. King is very angry with Joanna; and you needn't be afraid that Phronsie will ever be left again, until we do get just the right person to be with her. Now you better go out and forget it all, and busy yourself about something."

"I've got to practice," said Polly with a yawn, and stretching her arms. "I haven't done a bit this whole afternoon, and Monsieur comes tomorrow."

"Best fly at it, then," said Mrs. Fisher, smiling at her. So Polly, with a parting glance at the

figure on the little bed, went downstairs and into the big drawing-room, wishing that Phronsie was there, as usual, where she dearly loved to stay, tucked up in a big damask-covered chair, one of her dolls in her arms, waiting patiently till the practice hour should be over.

But when Phronsie at last turned over, and said without a bit of warning, "I want something to eat, I do," with an extremely injured expression, Mother Fisher was so thankful that she had no time to question her, if, indeed, she had considered it wise to do so. And Sarah was called, and laughed with delight at the summons, and ran off to get the tray ready, Phronsie watching her with hungry eyes in which the dew of sleep still lingered. But old Mr. King was not so patient.

When he saw, as he soon did, his visits to the side of the little bed being as frequent as Polly's own, that Phronsie was really awake and sitting up, he could keep still no longer, but putting his arms around her, fumed out:

"Oh, that careless Joanna! Poor lamb! There, there! Grandpapa will take care of his little girl himself, after this."

"I'm hungry," announced Phronsie, looking

up into his face. "Indeed I am, Grandpapa dear, very hungry."

"Oh, to think of it! Yes, Pet"—soothing her. "Where is that Sarah? Can't some one get this poor child a bit to eat?" he cried irascibly.

"Sarah will hurry just as fast as she can," said Mrs. Fisher, coming up with a dainty white gown over her arm. "Phronsie must be a good girl and wait patiently."

Phronsie wriggled her toes under the bedclothes.

"I wish you'd take me, Grandpapa dear," she said, holding up her arms.

"So I will—so I will, Pet!" cried old Mr. King, very much delighted; and lifting her up to rest her head on his shoulder, he walked up and down the room. "There, there, dear! Oh, why doesn't that Sarah hurry!"—when in walked that individual with a big tray, and on it everything that a hungry child could be supposed to desire. But Phronsie had no eyes for anything but the glass of milk.

"Oh, Grandpapa," she piped out at sight of it, "Sarah's got me some milk," and she gave a happy little crow.

"So she has," he laughed as gayly. "Well, now, we'll sit right down here and have some of these good things," and, Mrs. Fisher drawing up a big easy chair in front of the table where Sarah deposited the tray, he sat down, with Phronsie on his knee. "Now, child——"

"Oh, Grandpapa, may I have the milk?" she begged, holding out a trembling hand.

"Bless you, yes, child." He put the glass into her hand. "Take care, Phronsie, don't drink so fast."

"Honey will choke herself," cried Sarah, in alarm, holding up warning black fingers. "Oh, my! she's done drunk it mos' all up a'ready."

"There, there, Phronsie!" Grandpapa took hold of the glass.

"Phronsie," said Mother Fisher, and it was her hand that took the glass away from the eager lips. "You must eat a roll now, or a little bit of toast."

"But I want some more milk," said Phronsie, and her lips quivered.

"Not yet, Phronsie." Mother Fisher was cutting up the toast, and now held up a morsel on the spoon. "See how very nice it is."

"We'll play it is five-o'clock tea," said old Mr.

King, at his wit's end to bring the smiles into her face. Phronsie turned and gave him one look, then buried her face in his waistcoat and cried as hard as she could.

"There, there!" The old gentleman got up to his feet and began to pace the floor again, his white hair bent over her face, his hand patting her back gently. "Don't cry, poor little lamb." And as a sudden thought struck him, "Just look at your mother, Phronsie; you are making her sick."

Up popped Phronsie's yellow head, the tears trailing off from the round cheeks till they fell on the floor. There stood Mother Fisher, quite still.

"I'm sorry, Mamsie," said Phronsie, and she put out a little hand, "I'll eat the toast." So down old Mr. King sat again, with her on his lap, and Mother Fisher cut up more toast, and Phronsie opened her mouth obediently, and after the first mouthful she smiled: "I like it, I do." And Mother Fisher smiled too, and said, "I knew you would, Phronsie." And Grandpapa laughed, he was so happy, and Sarah kept crying, "Bress de Lawd! yer maw knew best." And pretty soon Mrs. Fisher nodded to old Mr. King,

and he said, "Now for the rest of the milk, Phronsie," and the glass was put into her happy hand.

And then more toast, and more laughing, for Grandpapa by that time told a funny story, and everything got so very merry that the gayety brought all the rest of the houseful of children up to see if Phronsie were really awake.

"Why didn't you tell us before?" cried Joel, in a dudgeon, revolving around the table. "She's been eating ever so long, and we thought she was asleep."

"That's the reason she's had a little peace," retorted the old gentleman.

"Catch them telling you, Joe!" said Percy Whitney, glad to pitch in with a word.

"Well, you didn't know it, either," said Joel, in great satisfaction. "Say, Phronsie, where were you all this morning?"

"Ugh!" cried Van, with a warning dig in his ribs.

"Let me alone," cried Joel, squaring around on him savagely.

"Look at Phronsie's face," said Percy, with a superior manner, as if no one needed to tell him when to speak.

Polly was on her knees cuddling up Phronsie's toes, and begging to feed her, when she felt her give a shiver, and try to hide her face on her neck.

"Don't, Joey," begged Polly. But Joel, not hearing her, and hating to be dictated to by Percy, cried out persistently:

"Say, Phron, what were you doing all the morning?"

Phronsie at this gave a loud sob. "Take me, Polly," was all she said. So Polly sat down on the floor, and Phronsie snuggled up closer into her neck, and was rocked back and forth to her heart's content, while Joel, perfectly aghast at the mischief he had done, was taken in tow by Mother Fisher, to sob out, his head in her lap, that he "didn't mean to, he didn't mean to."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed old Mr. King, in dismay, "this is a pretty state of things! Polly, my child"—he leaned over her—"can't you think up something to get us out of it?"

"I'm going to talk about the garden party," cried Polly, an inspiration seizing her. "Oh, Phronsie, now you must sit up; you can't think what plans we have for it." But Phronsie burrowed deeper in her nest.

"If you don't sit up, Phronsie," said Polly quite decidedly, "I shall have to put you off from my lap, and go out of the room."

"Oh, no, no, Polly!" cried Phronsie, clutching her around the neck.

"Yes, I shall, Phronsie," declared Polly, in her most decided fashion, "so you must sit right up, and hear all about it. Now, Jasper, you begin."

So Phronsie sat up and let Polly wipe her face; and then she folded her hands in her lap, while Jasper began:

"You see that we thought that we'd take the Wistaria arbor, Father, if you'd let us, for our post office. May we?"

"Yes, yes, certainly," said the old gentleman, who would have been quite willing to promise anything just then.

"Oh, that's no end jolly!" cried Jasper, throwing back his dark hair from his forehead with a quick thrust. "Now we can do splendidly. Polly, only think!" His eyes shone, and Polly screamed out, "Oh, Grandpapa, how lovely!" and the others joined in, not quite knowing what they were so happy about, until Joel popped up his head from his mother's lap to hear what all the noise was about over there.

"I'm going to be postmaster," he announced, wiping the tears off with the back of his hand, and plunging across the room.

"No, sir-ee!" declared Ben, seizing his jacket-end, "don't think it, Joe. Jasper is going to fill that important office."

"Yes, Jasper is," shouted Percy and Van together, delighted at anything that could keep Joel out. Davie stood perfectly still in the midst of the uproar.

"Why couldn't Joey be a letter carrier, to help give out the letters?" he said at last, in the midst of the noise. "Couldn't he, Ben?" and he ran to twitch that individual's sleeve.

"Hey—what?"

"Couldn't he be the one to give out some of the letters, and help Jasper?" asked David anxiously.

"I don't know—yes, maybe"—as he saw David's face fall. "You best ask Jasper, he's to be the postmaster."

So David ran over and precipitated himself into the middle of the group, with his question; when immediately the rest began to clamor to help Jasper give out the letters, so the babel was worse than at first.

Phronsie by this time was begging with the others, while she sat straight in Polly's lap, with very red cheeks and wide eyes. Now she slipped out, and rushed up to Jasper.

"And I, too, Japser; I want to give out letters, too," she cried, dreadfully excited.

"So you shall, Pet," he cried, seizing her to toss her up in the air, the others all circling around them, Phronsie's happy little crows going up high above the general din.

"Well, I think if we are going to have such a fine post office, we'll have to work pretty hard to write the letters," said Polly, after they had sobered down a bit.

"Ugh!" cried Joel with a grimace, "I'm not going to write a single scrap of one."

"Indeed you are," retorted Polly; "everybody has absolutely got to write some letters. Why, we must have a bushel of them."

"Oh, Polly Pepper!" cried the others, "a bushel of letters!"

"And no one can have a letter who doesn't write some," announced Polly firmly—"the very idea! So we must all work like everything to get ready for the post office."

III CLEM FORSYTHE

PHRONSIE sat on the stairs, halfway down the long flight. It was the same staircase on which Jasper had found her, with Polly waiting patiently on the lower step, when she first came to Grandpapa King's. Now she held Clorinda in her arms, tightly pressed to her bosom.

"I do wish," she said softly, "that I could see my poor little girl, I do."

Clorinda not replying, Phronsie smoothed down the pink gown.

"It wasn't very nice at that little girl's house" —and a troubled expression swept over her face —"but the little girl was nice, and she hadn't any child."

Clorinda's countenance expressed no sorrow, but stared up at her mother unblinkingly. Phronsie bent over and dropped a kiss on the red lips.

"Maybe she'll come again some day, if I watch by the big gate."

"My goodness me!" Polly, running along the upper hall, peered over the railing. "What are you doing, Phronsie, sitting down in the middle of the stairs?"

"I'm thinking," said Phronsie, looking up.

"Well, I should say!" cried Polly, running down to sit beside her. "Oh, Pet, I've an invite for you." She seized Phronsie's hand and cuddled it in both of her own. "It's perfectly splendid."

"What's an 'invite'?" asked Phronsie, coming slowly out of her thoughts, to peer into Polly's face.

"Oh, I forgot, Mamsie didn't want me to say that," said Polly, with a little blush. "Well, it's an invitation, Pet, and to Miss Mary Taylor's, to go with us girls this afternoon to work on our fancy things for the fair. Only think of that, Phronsie Pepper!" And Polly threw her arms around the small figure, and hugged her, to the imminent danger of both falling down the rest of the flight.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Polly, "we almost went over."

"Can I really go, Polly?" cried Phronsie, as soon as she could get her breath, "when you all

take your bags and work on things?" She set Clorinda carefully down on the stair above, and stood up to look into Polly's face.

"Yes, child. Take care, you'll tumble over backward," warned Polly, with a restraining hand. "And oh, Phronsie! I'm going to make you a little silk bag, and you can take your pincushion to work on."

This was such a height of bliss that it quite overcame Phronsie, and she sat down on her stair again to think it over. To have a little silk bag to hang on her arm to carry her work in, just as Polly and the other girls did when they went to each other's houses with their fancy work, was more than she ever imagined was coming to her till she got as big as they were. And to put her "cushion-pin" in it, and go to Miss Mary Taylor's with them all, sent her into such a dream of delight that she sat quite still, her hands in her lap.

"Don't you like it, Pet?" cried Polly, disappointed at her silence.

Phronsie drew a long breath, then stood up and began to hop up and down on her stair.

"Oh, Polly," she cried, clapping her hands, "I'm going to have a little silk bag, I truly am, Polly, all my own—oh!"

"My goodness me, Phronsie!" cried Polly, seizing her arms, "you'll roll down and break your neck, most likely."

"And I'll take my cushion-pin"—Phronsie leaned over and put her face close to Polly's cheek—"and I'll sew on it for the poor children, I will," and she began to hop up and down again.

"Take care, and stop dancing," laughed Polly.

"And it shall be a pink bag," said Phronsie, dreadfully excited; "make it a pink bag, do, Polly."

"Oh, I don't know that I can do that," said Polly slowly, "because you know I took my piece of pink ribbon Auntie gave me, for that sachet case I'm making for the fair. But never mind, child"—as she saw a sorry little droop to Phronsie's mouth—"I'll find another somewhere, and it will be nice, even if it isn't pink."

"It will be nice," echoed Phronsie confidently, as long as Polly said so, and she clasped her hands.

"And come on, Pet, we'll go and find the ribbon and make the bag now, so as to be all ready." Polly flew up from her stair. "Pick up your doll, and give me your hand. Here we are!"—as they ran up to the top.

"I very much wish you wouldn't call her my doll," panted Phronsie, as they reached the last step; "she's my child, Polly."

"I know; I won't forget," laughed Polly. "Now, says I, Phronsie, for my piece-box!"

The invitation of Miss Mary Taylor to all the girls who were getting up the fair for the poor children's week, plunged them into such a state of excitement that those who had been lagging over their fancy work now spirited up on it, or ran down-street to get more materials and begin anew. One of these was Clem Forsythe.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Polly, looking up from the floor of her room, where Phronsie and she had thrown themselves, the piece-box of ribbons between them, "here comes Clem up the drive; now I 'most know she wants me to help her on that sofa-pillow," and she twitched a square of yellow silk into a tighter tangle. "How in the world did that spool get in here?" she exclaimed, in vexation.

"I'll get it out, let me," begged Phronsie, dropping a fascinating bunch of gay ribbons she was sorting in the hope of finding a pink one.

"Oh, you can't, child," cried Polly, her impatient fingers making sad work of the snarl.

"There, I'll break the old thing, there's no other way"—as Clem ran over the stairs and into the room.

"Oh, I'm so glad to find you!" panted Clem. "Dear me! what *are* you doing?" And not waiting for an answer, she plunged on: "I stopped at Alexia's—thought you might be there. And she's just as mad as can be because I was coming over here for you. You see, her aunt has something for her to do this morning. I'm tickled to death that for once I got ahead of her. Whew! I'm so hot! I ran every step of the way." She threw herself down on the floor beside the two. "My, what a sight of ribbons, Polly Pepper!"

"I'm going to have a silk bag, Clem," confided Phronsie, dropping the little bunch of ribbons in her lap, to lean over to look into the tall girl's face, "and I'm going to take my cushion-pin in it."

"Are you, really?" said Clem. "Oh, Polly, you see, I want you to——"

"Yes, I am." Phronsie nodded her yellow head. "Polly is going to make it right now, she is."

"Is she? Oh, dear!" Clem gave a groan. "Oh, Polly, I did want you to——"

"You see, I promised her this," Polly was guilty of interrupting. "She's been invited to Miss Mary's this afternoon with us girls, and she wants a silk bag to carry her work in, too, the same as we big girls have, don't you, Pet?" Polly stopped long enough in the final tussle with the snarl to set a kiss on Phronsie's round cheek.

"Yes, I do, Polly," laughed Phronsie, with a wriggle of delight, "and I'm going to carry my cushion-pin in it, I am."

"So you see I can't help you on your sofa-pillow, Clem," said Polly hurriedly, feeling dreadfully ashamed to have to say no.

"Oh, I don't want any help on it," said Clem; "I finished that old thing, Polly."

"Finished your sofa-pillow, Clem!" Polly dropped her snarl in her lap. "Why, how could you?—and you hadn't the dog worked, except one leg, and none of the filling in."

"Oh, I don't mean I finished it in that way," said Clem carelessly. "I mean I'm done with it forever. I just hate that old dog, Polly, and so I gave the whole thing to our second girl, and she's going to work it for Christmas and send it to her mother."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Polly, "and now you

won't give anything to the fair," and her mouth drooped sorrowfully.

"Oh, yes, I will, too," declared Clem cheerfully; "I'll give something ten times better than that old dog sitting up on a cushion. And nobody would have bought it when it was done, except my mother—I'd made her—so what's the use of finishing it? Anyway, I've given it to Bridget; and now I'm going to make the most elegant thing—you can't guess, Polly Pepper."

"What is it?" cried Polly, with sparkling eyes.

"Oh, that's telling," said Clem, in a tantalizing way. "You must guess."

"Polly," said Phronsie, with a gentle little twitch on her arm, "can you find any pink ribbon?"

"Yes, yes; I mean no, not yet," said Polly, in a preoccupied way, her eyes on Clem's face. "Oh, I can't guess; it might be anything, you know, Clem."

"But it isn't; I mean it's something," declared Clem, in great triumph. "Oh, do hurry, you're so slow, Polly; it's too elegant for anything!"

Polly leaned her face in her hands, and her elbows on her knees. "Mm, mm—oh, I know!"

She brought up suddenly, nearly overthrowing Phronsie, who had bent anxiously over her. "Take care, Pet, I came near bumping your nose. It's a workbag."

"A workbag!" exclaimed Clem, in great scorn. "Well, I guess not, Polly Pepper. What I'm going to make is ever so much better than an old workbag. Guess again."

At the mention of the workbag, Phronsie had gently pulled Polly's arm. But Polly was too deep in thought to notice, and she wrinkled her brows, and bent her head again in her hands. What could it possibly be that Clem was to make?

"Well, I think it is a sachet bag, then," she said at last.

"An old sachet bag, when all the girls are making oceans of 'em! I should think you'd be perfectly ashamed, Polly Pepper, to sit there and guess such things. I'm going to make a most beautiful, embroidered handkerchief case, with little violets all——"

"Why, you can't, Clem Forsythe!" Polly flew to her feet, sending the ribbon box flying, and nearly oversetting Phronsie. "You ought not to do any such thing," she ran on passionately, a little red spot coming on either cheek, "when you

know it 'll be just like mine. It would be too mean for anything."

"It won't be just like it," said Clem, twisting uncomfortably, and not looking up into Polly's face, "for mine is to be a wreath, and yours is a bunch."

"But it 'll be the same thing," cried Polly, too angry to think what she was saying, "and you're perfectly mean and hateful to copy mine."

"Polly," cried Phronsie, in a distressed little voice. She had gotten up to her feet, and now hurried over to hold Polly's gown. "Oh, don't, Polly, don't!"

"Go away," commanded Polly, angrily twitching her gown free; "you don't know what you are doing, Phronsie, to stop me. She's gone and chosen the very thing I thought of all by myself."

"I guess there are other violet handkerchief cases in the shops," said Clem coldly. She was getting over her uncomfortable fit, and now she sprang to her feet. "And I think you are mean and stingy, too, Polly Pepper"—she tossed her head high in the air—"to expect to keep all the best things to yourself, and we're all working ourselves most to death over this old fair. And

I did come to ask you to go down-town with me to buy my materials. Mother's given me five dollars to spend just as I like—but I shan't ask you now, so there!" She gave her head another toss, and walked off toward the door.

Phronsie deserted Polly and ran on unsteady little feet after her.

"Polly isn't mean and stingy," she quavered; "she couldn't be."

Clem looked down at her, and little uncomfortable thrills ran all over her.

"Well, anyway, she's mad at me," she said, with great decision.

"Oh, no, Polly isn't mad," declared Phronsie. She clasped her hands, and swallowed very hard to keep the tears back, but two big drops escaped and rolled down her cheeks. When Clem saw those, she turned away.

"Well, anyway, I'm going down-street by myself," she said, without a backward glance at Polly, and off she went.

"And if she thinks I'm going with her, or care what she does, after this," cried Polly, magnificently, with her head in the air, "she'll make a mistake."

"Polly, Polly!" The tears were rolling fast

now, and Phronsie could scarcely see to stumble back across the room to her side.

"And you don't know anything about it, child. To think of making a violet handkerchief case, and mine is almost done, and none of the girls would copy mine! And Jasper drew the flowers on purpose." She was going on so fast now that she couldn't stop herself.

"Mamsie wouldn't like it," wailed Phronsie, clear gone in distress now, and hiding her face in Polly's gown.

"Mamsie would say——" began Polly decidedly. Then she stopped suddenly. "Oh, what have I said!" she cried. "Oh, what can I do!" She clasped her hands tightly together. She was now in as much distress as Phronsie, and, seeing this, Phronsie came out of her tears at once.

"You might run after her," she said. "Oh, Polly, do."

"She won't speak to me," said Polly, with a little shiver, and covering her eyes. "Oh, dear, dear, how could I!"

"Yes, she will, I do believe," said Phronsie, putting down a terrible feeling at her throat. Not speak to Polly?—such a thing could never be! "Do run after her, Polly," she begged.

Polly took down her hands and went off with wavering steps to the door.

"I'll get your hat," cried Phronsie, running to the closet.

But Polly, once having decided to make the attempt at a reconciliation, was off, her brown braids flying back of her in the wind.

IV MISS TAYLOR'S WORKING BEE

LOOKING both sides of the road, not daring to think what she would say if she really did see Clem, Polly sped on. But not a glimpse of the tall girl's figure met her eyes, and at last she turned in at a gateway and ran up the little path to the door. Mrs. Forsythe saw her through the window that opened on the piazza.

"Why, Polly Pepper," she cried, "what a pity that Clem didn't find you! She went over to your house."

"Oh, I know, I know," panted Polly, with scarlet cheeks.

"Don't try to talk," said Mrs. Forsythe, "you are all out of breath. Come in, Polly."

"Oh, I can't. I mean I would like to see Clem," mumbled Polly, with an awful dread, now that she was on the point of finding her, of what she should say. It was all she could do to keep from running down the piazza steps and fleeing home as fast as she had come.

"Why, Clem isn't at home," said Mrs. Forsythe, in a puzzled way; "you know I told you she had gone over to your house. She wanted you to go down-town with her, to buy some materials to take over to Miss Mary's this afternoon and begin something new for the fair."

"Oh!" said Polly, in a faint voice, and hanging to the piazza railing.

"You see, she was all tired out over that sofa-pillow. I told her it was quite too ambitious a piece to do, and she was so discouraged I gave her some more money, and advised her to get something fresh. She had almost made up her mind to give up working for the fair altogether."

"Oh, dear me!" gasped Polly, quite overcome.

"Yes." Mrs. Forsythe leaned comfortably against the door-casing. It was such a comfort to tell her worries to Polly Pepper. "Clem said all the other girls were making such pretty things, and it was no use for her to try. She can't get up new ideas quickly, you know, and she was ashamed not to take in something nice, and so she said she didn't mean to do anything. I couldn't bear to have her give it up, for she ought to keep with you girls." Mrs. Forsythe's face

fell into anxious lines. "She gets unhappy by herself, with no young people in the house and only my mother and me to brighten her up. So I talked with her a long while this morning, and at last got her to be willing to try again. Well, it's all right now, for she's started to find you, and go down-town to buy the things," and Mrs. Forsythe smiled happily.

Polly sank to the piazza steps and buried her face in her hands.

"Why, my dear, are you ill?" Clem's mother deserted the door-casing and came quickly out. "Let me get you something."

"Oh, no, no!" Polly sprang to her feet and hurried down the steps. "I must go home," she said hoarsely; and not pausing to think, only to get to Mamsie, she sped away on the wings of the wind, not stopping until she had turned in at the little green wicket-gate where she wouldn't be likely to meet any one.

"Oh, dear, dear!"—and she hurried across the grass—"supposing Mamsie isn't at home! She was going out for Auntie. What *shall* I do?"

In her despair she raced over the greensward and plunged into the Wistaria arbor—to stand face to face with Clem!

Polly was too far gone in distress to say anything. Clem jerked up her head from the table, and raised a defiant pair of cheeks, wet and miserable. "Oh, dear, dear!" was all Polly could get out. But she stumbled in and put her arms around her neck, and down went the two heads together.

"I'm awfully sorry," blubbered Clem. "Oh, dear! I forgot my handkerchief."

"Take mine." Polly put a wet little wad into her hand. "Oh, Clem, if you don't let me go down-town with you and buy that handkerchief case!"

"Let you!" cried Clem. "You won't want to go with me, Polly. But I'm not going to work a handkerchief case."

"Oh, yes, you are," declared Polly positively. "If you don't, Clem Forsythe!"

"It was mean in me to choose it," said Clem, beginning to sniffle again, now that she had a handkerchief.

"Oh, no, no!" said Polly in alarm. "Now I know you won't forgive me when you say such things. For it was all my fault; I was stingy mean to want to keep it to myself."

"You aren't ever mean, Polly Pepper!" Clem

hugged her so tightly by the neck that the neat little ruffle Mamsie sewed in that very morning was quite crushed. When she saw that, Clem was in worse distress than ever.

"See here! Why, Clem Forsythe!" Polly Pepper flew up to her feet so suddenly, that Clem started in amazement, and stared at her as well as she could with her eyes full of tears.

"Why, can't you see? Haven't we been two goosies—geese, I mean—not to think of it before!"

"What?" asked Clem helplessly.

"Why, you might make a violet *glove* case," said Polly, in a burst. Then she began to dance around the arbor. "Oh, Clem, how perfectly lovely!"

"I don't see," began Clem dismally, "and I don't know how to make a glove case."

"Why, make it just like my handkerchief case, only long," flung Polly over her shoulder, as she danced away.

"But I don't want to copy yours," protested Clem, "for it really would be mean."

"But this would make a set, yours and mine," said Polly breathlessly, and coming up to shake the downcast shoulders, "don't you see? Oh,

you goosie! and I've been another, not to think of it before. And oh, such a set! Why, it would sell for a lot of money. And I'll ask Jasper to draw you the same kind of bunch of violets on your glove case, and we'll go right down-town, now. I can make Phronsie's bag when I get home. Come on!"

When Clem once had the idea in her mind, she got off from the bench, and Phronsie, watching anxiously from Polly's window for her return, saw the two girls hurrying across the lawn, their arms around each other and talking busily. And it wasn't but a moment or two, and she was flying over the grass to meet them. Polly had explained that the little ribbon bag was to be made just as soon as the materials for the new glove case were bought. Polly had run up for her hat, and to get her little purse, for she just remembered that her green silk for the violet stems was nearly out, and Phronsie had said good-bye and gone back to the house on happy feet, to tell Clorinda and watch at the window till Polly should come again.

And just after luncheon, for they must start early in order to have a good long afternoon at Miss Mary's, Polly and Phronsie set forth, the new little bag hanging from Phronsie's arm.

Jasper went with them as far as the corner, where he turned off to go to Jack Rutherford's, for the boys were to meet there to write letters for the post office. They had promised to be there bright and early.

"Oh, Jasper, it was so good of you to draw that dear bunch of violets for Clem," said Polly for about the fiftieth time; "it was too sweet for anything."

"Too sweet for anything," hummed Phronsie, all her eyes on her bag, dangling as she walked.

"Take care, you came near falling on your nose, Phronsie." Jasper put out a warning hand.

"I think it's so nice there's a pink stripe in it, Polly," said Phronsie, patting her bag affectionately.

"Yes, isn't it, Pet!" cried Polly, glad she hadn't snipped up that very ribbon for little sachet bags. "And the green stripe, too, is pretty, Phronsie."

"It's pretty," cooed Phronsie, "and my cushion-pin is inside, Japser," she announced.

"Is it really?" said Jasper.

"Yes, it is really and truly, Japser, and I'm going to work on it," she added, with a very important air.

"You don't say so, Pet!" he cried. "Why, you are going to a working bee just the same as the big girls, aren't you?"

"I'm very big," said Phronsie, stepping so high she nearly fell into a mud-puddle. Whereat Jasper picked her up, bag and all, and marched off, laughing, not to set her down till they reached the corner.

"Well, good-bye. Take care now, Phronsie," and he gave her a kiss. "Good-bye, Polly, and good luck to your bee."

"And I do hope you'll have splendid success with the letters, Jasper," Polly craned her neck around the corner to say, the last thing. Then she took Phronsie's hand and hurried along to meet a throng of girls, all bound for Miss Mary's.

There on the big stone steps was Mr. Hamilton Dyce.

"I heard there was to be a bee here this afternoon," he said, looking down at them all with a smile, "so I thought I'd come."

"I'm coming," announced Phronsie, breaking away from Polly and holding up her bag; and she began to mount the steps.

"So I perceive," said Mr. Dyce, running down

to meet her. "Well, Phronsie, I must tell you I came partly to see you."

"And I've got a cushion-pin inside," said Phronsie confidingly, as she toiled up.

"Have you, though?" cried Mr. Dyce. "Take care, don't go so fast. Let some of these girls race ahead of us; we'll take our time. How d'ye, Polly, and Alexia, and all the rest of you?"

"But I must hurry," said Phronsie, with a very pink face, as the bevy rushed by, "for I'm going to work on my cushion-pin."

"So you must. Well, then, here goes!" Mr. Dyce swung her up to his shoulder and went, two steps at a time, in through the crowd of girls, so that he arrived there first when the door was opened. There in the hall stood Miss Mary Taylor, as pretty as a pink.

"I heard there was to be a bee here this afternoon, and I've brought Phronsie; that's my welcome," he announced.

"See, I've got a bag," announced Phronsie from her perch, and holding it forth.

So the bag was admired, and the girls trooped in, going up into Miss Mary's pretty room to take off their things. And presently the big library, with the music-room adjoining, was filled

with the gay young people, and the bustle and chatter began at once.

"I should think you'd be driven wild by them all wanting you at the same minute." Mr. Dyce, having that desire at this identical time, naturally felt a bit impatient, as Miss Mary went about inspecting the work, helping to pick out a stitch here and to set a new one there, admiring everyone's special bit of prettiness, and tossing a smile and a gay word in every chance moment between.

"Oh, no," said Miss Mary, with a little laugh, "they're most of them my Sunday-school scholars, you know."

"That's all the more reason that you ought not to be bothered with them week days," observed Mr. Dyce. "Now why can't you sit down here and amuse me?" He pushed up an easy-chair into a cosy-corner, then drew up an ottoman, on which he sat down.

"Oh, look at that Mr. Dyce," said Clem, quite in a flow of spirits, as she threaded her needle with a strand of violet silk; "he's going to keep Miss Mary off there all to himself. What did make him come this afternoon?"

"Well, he isn't going to have Miss Mary!" cried Alexia Rhys, twitching her pink worsted

with an impatient hand. "Horrors! Now I've gone and gotten that into a precious snarl. The very idea! She's our Sunday-school teacher. Oh, Miss Mary!" she called suddenly.

Miss Taylor, just sitting down in the easy-chair, turned. "What is it, Alexia?"—while Mr. Dyce frowned. At which Alexia laughed over at him.

"Please show me about my work," she begged.

"You little tyrant!" called Mr. Dyce, as Miss Mary went over.

"Do I slip one stitch and then knit two?" asked Alexia innocently. Polly, next to her on a cricket, opened wide eyes.

"Yes," said Miss Mary, "just the same as you have been knitting all along, Alexia."

"Well, I couldn't think of anything else to ask," said Alexia coolly. Then she laid hold of Miss Mary's pretty, gray gown.

"Oh, don't go back to him," she implored. "Do stay with us girls, we're all your Sunday-school class—that is, most of us. *Please* stay with us, Miss Mary."

Miss Mary cast an imploring glance over at the gentleman, which he seemed to see, although apparently he wasn't looking.

"Phronsie, you and I will have to move over, I think"; for by this time he had her in his lap; and so he bundled her across the room unceremoniously.

"Oh, I've lost my needle!" cried Phronsie, peering out from his arms in great distress.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Dyce; so he set her down and dropped to all-fours to peer about for the shining little implement, Phronsie getting down on her knees to assist the search.

Alexia, seeing the trouble, deserted her knitting, and flew out of her chair to help look for it.

"You little tyrant!" exclaimed Mr. Dyce, as she added herself to the group, "to call Miss Mary over there! I should think it was quite bad enough to have you Sundays, Alexia."

"Miss Mary thinks a great deal of me," said Alexia composedly. "Dear me, what a plaguey little thing that needle is! Never mind, Phronsie, don't feel badly. I guess—oh, here it is, and sticking straight up."

"And all this would never have happened but for your calling Miss Mary away," observed Mr. Dyce, getting up straight again. "What a little nuisance you are, Alexia!" All of which she

had heard from him so many times before that it failed to disturb her, so she went back to her seat in high spirits, Phronsie hopping over like a small rabbit to a little cricket at Polly's feet. At this there was a bustle among the girls.

"Sit next to me, Miss Mary," begged Silvia Horne, sweeping a chair clear.

"No, no," cried Amy Garrett, "she's coming here!"

"I call that nice," exclaimed Alexia decidedly, "when I asked her to come across the room! I'm going to sit next to her of course."

"You'd much better have stayed with me," laughed Mr. Hamilton Dyce, "since there 'll be one long fight over you. Better come back."

But Miss Mary, protesting that the girls needed her, finally settled it by getting her chair into the middle of the group, which she made into a circle.

"There, now, we're all comfy together," she announced. "Now, Mr. Dyce, you must read us something."

"Oh, tell us a story," put in Alexia, who didn't relish listening to reading.

"Oh, yes, a story, a story," they one and all took it up. Even Phronsie laid de you er big

needle which she was patiently dragging back and forth, with a very long piece of red worsted following its trail across the face of her "cushion-pin" in a way to suit her own design, to beg for the story.

"Oh, Phronsie!" exclaimed Polly, for the first time catching sight of this, "you can't work with such a long thread. Let me cut off some of it, do."

"Oh, no, no," protested Phronsie, edging off in alarm.

"Why, it 'll get all knotted up," said Polly, in concern; "you better let me take off a little—just a little, teenty bit, Phronsie."

"No, no," declared Phronsie decidedly, "I must hurry and get my cushion-pin done."

"She thinks she'll get it done faster with a great, long thread," giggled one of the girls over in the corner. Mr. Dyce turning to fix her with a stare, she subsided, ducking behind her neighbor's back.

"Phronsie, I must buy that cushion-pin at the fair," he announced. "I want such an one very much indeed."

Phronsie got off from the little cricket where he had placed her, and went straight over to him,

to lay her hand with the "cushion-pin" in it on his knee. "Then I will sell it to you," she said gravely, "and the poor children can go into the country." Then she went back to her seat and took up her work once more.

Some of the girls laughed, but Alexia frowned furiously at them; and Mr. Dyce and Miss Mary apparently seeing no amusement in it, they all began to beg for the story again, till the clamor bade fair to stop the needles from doing their work.

"I guess you'll have to," Miss Mary smiled over at him from the center of the circle, while the color deepened on her cheek.

"I want a story told to me first," he said coolly, leaning back in his chair. "What is all this bee for, and this fair? I know just a hint about that, but let me have the whole story from beginning to end. Now then, some one tell me. I am very anxious to hear."

"You tell, Polly," cried Alexia, and "Let Polly Pepper tell, can't she, Miss Mary?" begged all the girls, every one saying the same thing. So Miss Mary said yes, and Polly laid down her violet handkerchief case in her lap, although she hated to stop working, and began:

"You see, Miss Mary said one day in Sunday-school——"

"Oh, Polly, not that!" said Miss Taylor, in dismay.

"Go on, Polly, and tell every word," said Mr. Hamilton Dyce. "I'm to be told the whole story; from the very beginning, now mind. You said, 'One day in Sunday-school.' Now go on."

"Yes," said Polly, her cheeks like a rose for fear her dear Miss Mary might not like it, "Miss Mary said we ought to be doing things, not always talking about them and learning how to be good; and she said there were so many poor children who were waiting for us to help them. And——"

"Polly, you don't need to tell that. He wants to know about the fair," Miss Taylor broke in suddenly.

"Oh, dear!" said poor Polly, blushing rosier than ever and moving her cricket so that she need not see Miss Mary's face, while Mr. Dyce, protesting that he was not to be cheated out of a single word of the narration, made her go back and tell over the last thing she said. This was so much worse that Miss Mary decided she

would let the story go on at all hazards, so she leaned back in her chair resignedly, while Polly went on:

"Well, and so we said, 'Yes, Miss Mary, we'd like to,' and what could we do, for we didn't know how to help poor children."

"And I said I didn't want to," broke in Alexia suddenly.

"But you did, Alexia!" cried Polly, whirling around on her cricket to regard her affectionately. "Oh, Mr. Dyce, she did help"—looking over at him anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I see," nodded that gentleman, "and she's working on some fandango for the fair just as hard as you other girls."

"Oh, this horrible old shawl!" said Alexia, regarding the worsted folds dangling from her needle with anything but favor. "Well, I didn't want it, and nobody will buy it, I know, but the other girls were all going to do things, so I had to."

"Well, go on, Polly," said Mr. Dyce, with a laugh. So Polly, quite satisfied that he really understood how Alexia was helping along the work for the poor children the same as the others, hurried on with the story.

"Well, so then Miss Mary proposed that we hold a fair, and Grandpapa said we might have it on his grounds; and Auntie Whitney said why not have a garden party, and sell tickets, for perhaps some people wouldn't care to buy things and——"

"And I'm going to put my cushion-pin on the table," piped Phronsie suddenly, her cheeks all aglow with excitement, and dropping her needle again.

"So you shall," cried Mr. Dyce, "only you must have a little card saying 'Sold' on it; for I am surely going to buy that pincushion, Phronsie."

And then Polly flew back to her work again, and Mr. Dyce told such a very funny story about some monkeys who were going to give a party in the woods to all the other animals, that Phronsie forgot all about her needle, and ran over to clamber up into his lap.

And then, oh, the needles flew; and Clem's green stems began to grow, and a tiny bud showed itself, and then a full-blown violet. And Alexia's pink shawl took ever so many rows, and all the work seemed to flourish like magic. And at last, Miss Mary looked up at the clock.

"Time to put up work, girls," she cried gayly. And then wasn't there a great bustle, every one trying to see which would get hers into her bag first! And then, oh, such a stretching of tired arms and feet!

"Oh, dear me! the prickles are all running up and down my legs," exclaimed Alexia.

"Hush, well, so are mine," declared Clem. "Oh, dear me—ow! I haven't sat still for so long—ever, I guess."

"Nor I," laughed another girl.

"Come." Miss Mary was telling Mr. Dyce to lead the way to the dining-room. So they all fell into line, and, when there, they forgot tired legs and arms in the delights of the little feast set out.

Miss Mary sat down by the small table and poured chocolate for them, a white-capped maid at her chair, Mr. Hamilton Dyce on the other side as grand helper. Then the girls settled down in pretty groups on the broad window-seats, and on the high-backed chairs, and gave themselves up to the supreme content of the hour.

And then Miss Mary proposed that they should wind up the afternoon with a dance, which was received with a shout of delight. So

she led the way to the drawing-room and sat down before the grand piano.

"Can't one of you girls play?" asked Mr. Dyce, at that.

"Oh, no, no," said Miss Mary, "the girls must dance." So, without waiting for any words, she struck into a two-step.

"Oh, I'll play, I'll play." Polly Pepper ran out from the midst of the group.

"Polly, come back, you are going to dance with me," cried Alexia.

"No, you're always getting her first. She's going to dance with me," announced Clem.

Polly was already over at the piano, trying to be heard, but Miss Mary only laughed and shook her head.

"No use, Polly," said Mr. Dyce, and he put his arm around her, and away they went down the length of the drawing-room.

"Well, at least you haven't got this first dance," said Alexia.

"Nor you, either," retorted Clem. "So come on, let's dance together," and away they went, too.

And at last, when it was time to go home, Mr. Hamilton Dyce, who had absented himself after

that first dance, drove up with a flourish to the door in his runabout.

"I've come for Phronsie Pepper," he said.

So Phronsie, half asleep, had her hat tied on, and kissed Miss Mary, and Polly lifted her up and guided her foot over the step, Mr. Dyce, the reins in one hand, helping her with the other.

"Good-bye," he called, his eyes on no one but Miss Mary.

"Oh, my bag, my bag!" cried Phronsie, in a wail of distress, and leaning forward suddenly.

"Take care, child; where are you going?" Mr. Dyce put forth a restraining hand and held her closely.

"My bag!" Phronsie looked back, the tears racing over her round cheeks.

"I'll bring it home," called Polly from the steps, where she was back among the knot of girls.

"My bag!" Phronsie continued to wail.

"Dear me!" cried Polly, "she must have it now." So she ran into the house to get it, where Phronsie had left it on her little cricket, Mr. Dyce meanwhile saying, "There, there, child, you shall have it," while he turned the little mare sharply about.

"We can't ever find the needle," said Alexia, rushing after Polly into the library, and getting down on her knees to prowl over the floor. "Misery me!"—with a jump—"I've found it already, sticking straight into me!"

So Phronsie's "cushion-pin" was thrust into the gay little pink-and-green-striped workbag, and Polly danced out with it and handed it up to her. Mr. Dyce cracked the whip, and this time they were fairly off.

V "SHE'S MY LITTLE GIRL"

"OH, I do wish, Polly," cried Phronsie, as they ran along the hollyhock path, "that my poor little girl could go to the country. Can't she, Polly?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes, of course," assented Polly, her mind on the garden party, now only three days ahead. "Phronsie, how perfectly elegant those roses are going to be!"—pointing off to the old-fashioned varieties blooming riotously.

"Oh, Polly!" Phronsie stood still a moment in silent bliss, then hopped up and down the narrow path. "I'm so glad she can go! Oh, Polly, I'm so *very* glad!"

"Who?" cried Polly, in perplexity.

"My little girl, my poor little girl," said Phronsie, hopping away.

"Oh, of course." Polly gave a little laugh. "Well, there are lots of poor little girls who will go, Phronsie," she said, in great satisfaction, "because, you know, we're going to make a great

deal of money, I expect. Why, Grandpapa has told Thomas to buy ever so many flowers. Just think, child, and the oceans we have here!" She waved her hands over to take in not only the old-fashioned garden where they stood, but the smart flower-beds beyond, the pride and joy of the gardeners. "Oh, yes, there will be ever so many children who will be happy in the country in the summer."

"And my poor little girl," persisted Phronsie gleefully, "she will be happy, Polly. Oh, let's go down to the big gate—p'raps she's there now —and tell her. Please, Polly." She seized Polly's hand in great excitement.

Polly sank to her knees in delight over a little bed of daisies.

"I do think these are the very sweetest things, Phronsie Pepper," she said. "See the cunning baby ones coming out."

"Please, Polly," begged Phronsie, clinging to her hand.

"Why, Phronsie!" Polly looked up in amazement. Not to pay attention to the baby daisies was certainly astonishing, when Phronsie was always so rapt over the new flowers. "What is it you want, child?"

"Please come down to the big gate, Polly," pleaded Phronsie, her lip quivering, for Polly was not usually so hard to understand.

"Yes, I will," said Polly, reluctantly tearing herself away from the fascinating daisies. "Now then, we'll go there right away; one, two, three, and away!"

"I guess—she'll—be—there," panted Phronsie, but she was running so fast to keep up with Polly's longer steps that her words died away on the air; and Polly, who dearly loved a race over the grass, was letting her mind travel to the delights of the garden party, and what it was going to accomplish, so she didn't hear.

At last there was the big gate.

"Dear me!" cried Polly, with a gay little laugh, "what a fine race! No wonder you wanted me to try it with you! Why, Pet, have I run too fast?" She looked with remorse at the flushed little face.

"No," gasped Phronsie, "but oh, Polly, will you sit down on the grass?"

"To be sure I will," said Polly very remorsefully, "you're all tired out. There, let's come over here," and she led her over to the very tree under which Phronsie had fallen asleep. "Here's

where I found you the other day, Phronsie, when you were so tired. Heigh-ho!" And Polly threw herself down on the grass, and drew Phronsie into her lap.

"P'raps she'll come," said Phronsie, and the sorrowful look began to disappear as she cuddled in Polly's arms. "Don't you believe she will, Polly?" She put her face close to Polly's to peer anxiously into her brown eyes.

"Who, child?" asked Polly.

"The poor little girl—my poor little girl," exclaimed Phronsie.

"Oh, there isn't any little girl, at least any particular one," cried Polly. "We're going to send ever so many little girls into the country, Phronsie, but not any special one."

"Oh, yes, there is," contradicted Phronsie, her lip quivering again, and, despite all her efforts, the big tears began to course down her cheeks. "She's my little girl, and I like her. Please let her go, Polly. And maybe she'll come soon, if we only wait for her." It was a long speech, and by the time it was all out, Phronsie had laid her head in Polly's neck, and was sobbing as if her heart would break.

It was for this reason that Polly did not hap-

pen to look up across the grass to the big gate, so of course she couldn't be expected to see what took place there. And it was not until Phronsie had been persuaded to sit straight and have her tears wiped away, because Mamsie wouldn't like to have her cry, that any one guessed it at all. And in one instant Polly's lap was deserted, Phronsie was flying over the greensward, crying out:

"There she is—my poor little girl!"

It took but a moment for Polly's swift feet to follow, but none too soon, for the thin little face with the sharp, black eyes was withdrawn, and the flapping old shoes were beating a hasty retreat. But Polly was after her, and her hand was on her arm, and the first thing the stranger knew she was drawn within the big gateway, Phronsie circling around her with great satisfaction.

"She *did* come, Polly, she did."

"Lemme be. I warn't doin' nothin' but peekin'," said the girl, trying to wriggle away from Polly's grasp. But Polly held on.

"Don't be frightened; there isn't any one going to hurt you. What's your name, little girl?"

"She's my little girl," insisted Phronsie, trying to get hold of the thin little hand, which was less grimy than usual.

"What's your name?" asked Polly again.

"Rag," said the girl, in a burst.

"Rag? Oh, dear me!" said Polly.

"Lemme go. I hain't done no harm. Gran 'll be wantin' me."

"Who?"

"Gran." The girl, at that, tried to fold up her arms in the remains of her sleeves. But Polly saw the long, red welts that were not pleasant to look at. She gave a little shiver, but held on firmly to the tattered ends.

"Oh, make her stay," cried Phronsie; "I want her to play with me. I'll let you take Clorinda again, and she shall be your child," she stood up on tiptoe to say.

"Can't," said the girl, making a desperate effort to twitch away. "Lemme go."

"No, you cannot go until you have told me who you are, and how you know my little sister."

Rag looked into the brown eyes of the little girl not so much older, drew a long breath, then burst out, "She's visited me to my house," and,

putting on the most defiant expression possible, stood quite still.

"*Visited you at your house!*" echoed Polly. She nearly dropped the ragged sleeve.

"Yes, an' I give her a five-o'clock tea," said Rag proudly. "Any harm in that? An' I brung her home again, and she ain't hurt a bit. You lemme go, you girl, you!"

"You must come and see Grandpapa," said Polly firmly, a little white line around her mouth.

"I ain't a-goin'." Rag showed instant fight against any such idea.

"Then, if you don't," said Polly, gripping her arm, "I shall call the gardeners, and they will bring you up to the house."

"Oh, do come," cried Phronsie, who thought everything most delightfully conspiring to make her friend remain. "Dear Grandpapa will love you, little girl; come with Polly and me."

She took hold of her other arm, and Rag, seeing no way out of it and wholly bewildered, suffered herself to be led up to the grand mansion.

"Bless me; what have we here?" Old Mr. King, enjoying a morning constitutional on the big veranda, looked over his spectacles, which

he had forgotten to remove as he had just thrown down the morning paper in a chair, and stared in amazement at the three children coming over the lawn.

"My poor little girl, Grandpapa," announced Phronsie, releasing the arm she clung to, and tumbling up over the steps, "and please make her stay, and I'm going to let her take Clorinda," and she plunged breathlessly into the old gentleman's arms.

"Hoity-toity, child!" exclaimed old Mr. King, holding her closely. "Well, what have we here?"—as Polly led Rag up on to the veranda.

"I don't know, Grandpapa," said Polly, still keeping tight hold of the arm in its tattered sleeve.

"It seems to be a little girl," said Grandpapa, peering at the st-anger.

"Yes, it's my little girl," said Phronsie happily, "and she's come to play with me, Grandpapa."

"Oh, my goodness me!" exclaimed Mr. King, stepping backward and drawing Phronsie closer.

"I ain't come. *She* brung me," said the girl, pointing with a thumb over at Polly; "tain't my fault; she made me."

"Polly, what is all this?" asked the old gentleman perplexedly, staring at one and the other.

"I don't know, Grandpapa," said Polly, the little white line still around her mouth; "she says Phronsie has been at her house, and——"

"*Phronsie been at her house!*" thundered the old gentleman.

"Yes, she has. An' I give her a five-o'clock tea," cried Rag, in a burst, who, thinking that she was probably now going to be killed, began to take pleasure in telling all she knew. "Swell folks does; I seen 'em plenty of times on th' avenoo, an' here, too"—she nodded toward the long French windows—"an' I got as good a right, I guess. An' she let me take her doll, an' I like her. An' we had an orful good time till Gran came in, an' then we lit out, an' I brung her home. Now what you goin' to do about it?" She folded her thin arms as well as she could, for Polly was still holding to one, and glared defiantly out of her sharp, black eyes.

"Oh, Grandpapa, her arms!" Polly was pointing to the long, red welts.

Rag turned as if shot, and twitched the ragged sleeves down, tucking the free arm behind her back. "Lemme go, you girl: you

hain't no right to see 'em, it's none o' your business," she screamed at Polly. Old Mr. King had sunk into a chair. Phronsie, in his lap, was so busy in putting her face close to his, and telling him that it was really her own poor little girl, that she had failed to see the arms and the disclosures they had made.

"Go and get your mother," he said, after a breathing space. "Oh, stay! I can't hold her" —with a gesture of disgust.

"An' you ain't a-goin' to tetch me," declared Rag proudly; "no, sir-ee!"

"Well, Phronsie, you jump down and go and get your mother," Mr. King whispered, smoothing her yellow hair with a trembling hand.

"I will—I will," she cried gleefully, hopping out of his lap.

"Oh, don't send her away." All the defiance dropped out of Rag's face and manner, and she whimpered miserably. "She's th' only nice one there is here. Don't let her go."

"She's coming right back, little girl," said old Mr. King kindly. He even smiled. But the girl had hung her head, so she didn't see it, and she blubbered on.

"I'll bring Mamsie to see my poor little girl,"

Phronsie kept saying to herself over and over, as she scuttled off, and in a very few minutes Mother Fisher was out on the veranda in obedience to old Mr. King's summons.

"It's beyond me"—the old gentleman waved his hand at Rag—"you'll have to unravel it, Mrs. Fisher. Here, Phronsie, get up in my lap." He strained her so tightly to him, as Phronsie hopped into her accustomed nest, that she looked up.

"Oh, Grandpapa!" she exclaimed.

"Did I hurt you, child?" he said, in a broken voice.

"A little, Grandpapa dear," she said.

"Well—oh, Lord bless me! I can't talk, child," he finished brokenly.

"Are you sick, Grandpapa?" she asked, sitting straight to look at him anxiously. "Does your head ache? I'll smooth it for you," and she began to pat his white hair.

"Oh, no, child, my head doesn't ache. There, sit still, dear, that's all I want." So Phronsie cuddled up within his arms, feeling quite sure that now Mamsie had her own poor little girl, everything would be all right.

"She's my nice little girl, and I like her,"

Phronsie was saying. "Yes, I do, very much indeed, Grandpapa."

"You do?"

"Yes, and I want her to stay here, Grandpapa. Please, may she?"

"Oh, dear!"

"*Please,* Grandpapa dear." Phronsie put up one hand and tucked it softly under his chin. He seized it and covered it with kisses.

"Oh, my lamb — that wicked, careless Joanna!"

"What's the matter, Grandpapa?" Phronsie brought up her head to look at him with troubled eyes.

"Nothing—nothing, child; there, cuddle down again. Your mother is talking to the little girl, and she will fix up things. Oh, bless me!"

"Mamsie will fix up things, won't she, Grandpapa?" cooed Phronsie, wriggling her toes happily.

"Yes, dear."

"Grandpapa," said Phronsie, after a moment's silence only broken by a soft murmur of voices, for Mother Fisher had drawn her group to the further corner, "I don't think my little girl has got a very nice place to live in."

"Oh, Phronsie, child!" He strained her convulsively to his breast. "There, there, lamb, Oh, I didn't mean to! Grandpapa won't hurt his little pet for the world."

"You didn't hurt me this time," said Phronsie, "as much as you did before, Grandpapa dear."

"Oh, my child! Grandpapa wouldn't hurt a hair of your blessed head. Oh, that dreadful Joanna!"

"I like my own little girl very much indeed," said Phronsie, dismissing her own hurts to go on with her narrative. "Yes, I do, Grandpapa," she added decidedly, "but I don't like the place she lived in. And, Grandpapa"—here she drew a long breath—"there was an old lady came in, and I don't think she was a nice old lady, I don't, Grandpapa." Phronsie crept up a bit closer, if that were possible.

"What did she do, child?" He held his breath for the answer.

"She took hold of my arm," said Phronsie, a shiver seizing her at the remembrance, and she burrowed deeper within the protecting arms, "and she felt of my beads that Auntie gave me."

"What else?" He scarcely seemed to ask the question.

"And my own little girl pulled me away, and she carried me home, most of the way, and I like her." Phronsie brought herself up with an emphatic little nod, and smiled.

"That was good."

Phronsie smiled radiantly. "Wasn't it, Grandpapa!" she cried, in delight. "And I want her to stay. May she? Oh, may she? She's my own little girl."

"We'll see about it," said old Mr. King, with a thought of the long welts on the thin arms, and the furious old woman.

"What's that noise?" asked Phronsie, suddenly lifting her head.

"Oh, a bird, maybe," said the old gentleman, carelessly looking up to the vines swinging around the veranda. "There, lay your head down again, child."

"It didn't sound like a bird, Grandpapa. I thought some one was crying." Yet she put her yellow head obediently down, and didn't lift it again till Mother Fisher stood by the side of old Mr. King's chair.

"Well, is the conference over?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mrs. Pepper. Her lips had a little white line around them, too, like that on

Polly's mouth, and the black eyes had a strange expression.

Phronsie popped her head up like a bird out of its nest, and piped out:

"Oh, please, Mamsie, may she stay?"

"Yes," said Mother Fisher, "she is going to stay, Phronsie."

"Oh, my goodness me!" breathed old Mr. King.

Phronsie slipped out of his arms and began to dance, clapping her hands.

"I'm going to play with her now, but I must get Clorinda first," she cried excitedly.

"See here, Phronsie," Mother Fisher called, as she was flying off, "you must not play with the little girl yet."

Phronsie stood quite still.

"Come here to mother." Mrs. Fisher opened her arms and Phronsie scuttled into them like a little rabbit. Mrs. Pepper held her so closely that Phronsie looked up quickly.

"Why, you are hurting me like Grandpapa, Mamsie."

"Oh, my child!" Mother Fisher seemed to forget herself, as she bowed her head over Phronsie's yellow hair.

"What is the matter, Mamsie?" asked Phronsie. "I wish I could see your face," and she wriggled violently.

"Nothing is the matter now," said Mamsie. "There, child, now I'll tell you. If the little girl stays here, she——"

"She's my little girl," interrupted Phronsie.

"Well, if she stays here, she must be washed and have on clean clothes. So Sarah has taken her, and is going to fix her all up nice."

"Oh—oh!" cried Phronsie, in a transport, "and can she have some of Polly's clothes, Mamsie?"

"Yes, I guess so. Anyway, we will fix her up all nicely."

"And may she stay here for ever and ever," cried Phronsie, "and not go back to that un-nice old lady? Please, Mamsie, don't let her go back," she pleaded.

Over the yellow hair the old gentleman had found out and communicated several things back and forth. One was, "I don't think she is the child's own grandmother." "Mr. Cabot can investigate," and so on.

"What are you whispering about?" at last asked Phronsie.

"Nothing that you should know, dear. Now I'm going to put you in Grandpapa's lap, Phronsie. You must be a good girl," and Mother Pepper went off.

"You must take care of me, Phronsie," said the old gentleman, "for I really think I need it now. And I guess my hair does want to be smoothed, after all."

"I'll stay and take care of you, Grandpapa," said Phronsie, delighted that her services were really to be called for, and with her heart at rest about her own poor little girl.

VI GRANDMA BASCOM

"DEARY me!" Grandma Bascom stopped shooing out the hens from her kitchen doorway, and leaned on the broom-handle. "If here don't come Mis' Henderson! Now I shall hear about that blessed little creeter and all the rest of them childern."

"Good-afternoon." The parson's wife went swiftly up the flag-bordered path between the lilac bushes. "It's a beautiful day, Mrs. Bascom."

"Hey?" Grandma's shaking hand went up to her cap-border, so Mrs. Henderson had to say it over, that it was a beautiful day, as loud as she could.

"You've come to-day?" said Grandma. "Yes, I see you have, an' I'm obleeged to you, I'm sure, for it's mighty lonesome since that blessed little creeter, an' all the rest of them childern went away. Come in an' set down," and she led the way into the kitchen.

Meanwhile, the hens, seeing nothing to prevent it, had employed the time in slipping in under Grandma's short gown, and were busily scratching around for any stray bits.

"Thank you." The parson's wife nimbly found a chair, while Grandma bustled into the bedroom.

"Excuse me a minute, Mis' Henderson," she called; "I'm goin' to slip on t'other cap."

"Oh, don't take the trouble," said Mrs. Henderson's pleasant voice. But she might as well have said nothing, for Grandma didn't hear a word.

"'Tain't proper to see your minister's wife in your mornin' cap, nor your petticoat neither for that matter," said Grandma to herself, looking down at her short gown. So she concluded to put on her Sunday-go-to-meeting gown, as she called her best dress. This took her so long, because she hooked it up wrong three times, that Mrs. Henderson appeared in the doorway before the operation of dressing-up could be said to be finished.

"I'm very sorry," she began.

"'Tain't a bit o' trouble," said Grandma cheerfully, pulling at the second hook, which she had

been trying for some time to get into the first eye; "you set down, Mis' Henderson, an' I'll be out pretty soon."

"I must go very soon." The parson's wife came quite close to say this, up under the frill of the best cap, which stood out very stiffly, as Grandma always kept it in a covered box on top of her high bureau.

"Hey?"

"I must go home soon. I have so many things to see to this afternoon."

It was a fatally long speech, for Grandma only attended to the last part.

"It's aft-noon? I know it. I'm comin' 's soon 's I can git this hooked up"—with another pull at the mismated hooks and eyes. Seeing this, in despair the parson's wife took the matter of hooking up into her own hands, and before long the Sunday-go-to-meeting gown could be said to be fairly on.

"Now that's something like," observed Grandma, in great satisfaction. "I hain't been hooked up by any one since Mis' Pepper went away. Deary me, how I should set by a sight o' her, an' th' blessed little creeter—there ain't none other like that child."

Mrs. Henderson nodded, being sparing of words.

"I've some letters from them," she said loudly, "and if you come out to the kitchen, I will stay and read them to you."

"What did you say was the matter in the kitchen?" demanded Grandma, in alarm. "Oh, them dirty hens, I s'pose, has got in again."

"I have letters from the Pepper children, and they ask me to come over here and read them to you," shouted Mrs. Henderson. "Dear me!" —to herself—"what shall I do? I'm all tired out already, and three letters to read—she won't hear a word."

But Grandma, having caught the word "letters," knew quite well what was in store, so, picking up her best gown by its side breadths, she waddled out and seated herself with great dignity in a big chair by the kitchen window. It was next to the little stand in whose drawer she used to let Joel Pepper look for peppermints.

When the Pepper children shut up the little brown house to go to Mr. King's, Grandma moved the small mahogany stand from its place next to the head of her bed out into the kitchen. She kept her big Bible on it, and her knitting

work, where she could "have 'em handy." And it made her feel less lonesome to look up from her work to see it standing there.

"Seem 's though that boy was a-comin' in every minute," she said. "My land o' Goshen, don't I wish he was!" for Grandma always had a soft spot in her heart for Joel.

Now she smoothed down her front breadth, and folded her hands in a company way. The parson's wife drew up a kitchen chair close to her side and unfolded the first letter.

"Who writ that?" asked Grandma eagerly.

"That's from Polly," said Mrs. Henderson.

"Bless her heart!" cried Grandma. "Well, what does she say?"

"Ma"—a light-haired, serious boy appeared in the doorway—"Pa wants you," he announced.

"Oh, Peletiah!" exclaimed the parson's wife, in consternation, at his unlooked-for appearance, and, "Oh, Grandma!" in the same breath, "I'm so sorry I must go."

"So sorry? What's ben a happenin' that Polly's sorry?" said Grandma, supposing that was in the letter. "Now I know that blessed little creeter has got hurt, an' they wouldn't let me know afore the rest."

"It isn't in the letter," declared Mrs. Henderson, in a loud, hasty tone, hurrying out of her chair. "Peletiah, what does your father want, do you know?"

"I don't know exactly," said Peletiah deliberately, "only Aunt Jerusha tumbled down the cellar stairs; maybe that's it."

"Oh, dear me! dear me!" cried the parson's wife, in a great fright. "Peletiah, here are the letters from the Pepper children"—thrusting them into his hand—"do you stay and read them to Grandma. And be sure to tell her why I went home," and she actually ran out of the kitchen, and down the lilac-bordered path.

Peletiah, left alone with the letters, turned them over and over in his hands, as he stood quite still in the middle of the kitchen floor. He never thought of disobeying, and presently he pulled up another chair, just in front of Grandma, and sat slowly down.

"Oh, I know she's got hurted bad," she kept groaning, "an' I shan't never see her again. Oh, the pretty creeter! Hain't she hurted bad?" she asked anxiously, bringing her cap frills to bear on the boy in front.

"Yes, I guess so," said Peletiah cheerfully;

"she fell way down all over the cat sitting on the stairs."

"Where'd you say she fell?" screamed Grandma.

"Cellar stairs." Peletiah raised his voice, too, and sprawled out his hands to show how his Aunt Jerusha must have descended.

"Oh, me! oh, my!" exclaimed Grandma, in great sorrow, "that blessed little creeter! to think she's fell and got hurted!"

"She ain't little," said Peletiah, who was extremely literal, "she's awful long and bony!" And he could think of no special reason for calling her blessed, but that might be Grandma's fancy.

"Well, read them letters," said Grandma mournfully, when she could control her speech enough to say anything; "maybe they'll tell more about the accident," and she put her hand again behind her best ear.

"'Tain't in the letters," said Peletiah, "it's only just happened." But Grandma didn't hear, so he picked up Polly's letter, which was open, and began in a singsong tone:

"'Dear Mrs. Henderson——'"

"Hey?"

"'Dear Mrs. Henderson,'" cried Peletiah, in a shrill, high key.

"Do move up closer; I'm a little hard o' hearin'—jist a mite," said Grandma. So Peletiah shoved his chair nearer, and began again:

"'Dear Mrs. Henderson, we are going to have the very loveliest thing happen, and I want to write to you now, because next week there won't be any time at all, we shall be so very busy.'"

It was impossible to stop Peletiah until he had rounded a sentence, as he considered it his duty to pay strict attention to a period. So, although Grandma screamed, and even twitched his jacket sleeve, she couldn't get him to stop. The consequence was that he had to shout this over till at last she understood it, and then she turned a bewildered face upon him, but as he was deep in his second sentence, he didn't see it, but plodded patiently on.

"'Grandpapa is going to let us have a garden party; there are tickets to be sold, for we are going to raise money to send poor children out into the country. And Jasper is getting up the post office, which Grandpapa says we may have in the Wistaria arbor. And we girls are all

making fancy work, and oh, Phronsie is making a pin-cushion which Mr. Hamilton Dyce has bought already. Just think, and oh, I do believe we shall make lots and lots of money! Give my love to dear, dear Grandma Bascom, and please read this letter to her. From your loving little friend, Polly.'"

Peletiah, considering it better to read this all as one sentence, had droned it out without a break, to look up and find Grandma sunken back against her chair, her cap frills trembling with indignation.

"I hain't heard a single word," she said, "an' there's that blessed child got hurt, an' I can't seem to sense it at all."

"She ain't hurt, Polly ain't," said Peletiah, stoutly defending himself. "They're going to have a garden party."

"A what?" screamed Grandma.

"A *garden* party."

"Oh, then she fell in the garding, an' you said cellar stairs," she cried reproachfully.

Peletiah looked at her long; then he got out of his chair and leaned over her.

"My Aunt Jerusha fell," he screamed, so loud that Grandma started.

"Oh, an' the Pepper children ain't hurt?" she cried, in great relief.

"No, they're going to have a party." He wisely left out the garden this time.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Grandma, greatly pleased at the hint of any festivities, no matter how distant, and the smiles began to run all over her wrinkled face again. "I wonder now," she said, "if they don't want my receet for Cousin Mirandy's weddin' cake; it's in th' Bible there"—nodding over to the little stand.

Peletiah, seeing her so absorbed, waited patiently till the second letter was called for. He never for an instant thought of sliding off; so he pulled it out of its envelope, and got ready.

At last Grandma pulled herself out of the charms of Cousin Mirandy's receet, and set her spectacles straight.

"Who writ that one?" she asked.

"Joel," said Peletiah, finding it quite to his liking to read this one, for Joel never wasted any time in preliminaries, but came to the point at once, in big, sprawly letters.

"'Dear Misses Henderson.'" Somebody must have corrected him then, for he scratched out the "Misses," and wrote on top "Mrs."

" ' You tell Grandma Bascom, please, that it's just prime here, but I like her peppermints, too, and I won't chase her old hens when I come back. Joel.' "

When Grandma really got this letter by heart, she laughed and said it had done her good, and she wished Joel was there this minute, in which Peletiah hardly concurred, being unable to satisfy Joel's athletic demands. And then she looked over at the little mahogany stand, and the tears rolled down her withered old cheeks.

" I'd give anythin' to see him comin' in at that door, Peletiah," she said, " an' he may chase th' hens all he wants to when he comes back "; for Grandma always cherished the conviction that the " Five Little Peppers " were to make life merry again in their " little brown house," and she went on so long in this way that Peletiah, who had glanced up at the clock many times, said at last, in a stolid way, " There's another letter." And Grandma, looking down, saw a little wad in his hand.

" Now I do believe that's from the blessed little creeter," she exclaimed, very much excited; " that must be Phronsie's."

" Yes, it is," said Peletiah.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" cried Grandma. "You should 'a' read it first of all." She leaned forward in her chair, unable to lose a word.

"You didn't tell me to," said Peletiah, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Well, read it now," said Grandma, quavering with excitement.

"There ain't nothin' to read," said Peletiah, unfolding the paper, many times creased.

"Hey?"

"There ain't nothin' to read," repeated Peletiah; "you can see for yourself." He held it up before her. There were many pencil marks going this way and that, by which Phronsie felt perfectly sure that her friends would understand what she was telling them. And once in a while came the great achievement of a big capital letter laboriously printed. But for these occasional slips into intelligible language, the letter presented a medium of communication peculiar to itself.

"Ain't it sweet!" said Grandma admiringly, when she had looked it all over. "The little precious creeter, to think of her writin' that, and all by herself too!"

"You can read it as well upside down," observed Peletiah.

"I know it." Grandma beamed at him. "Just think of that child a-writin' that! Who'd ever b'lieve it?"

"I must go now," announced Peletiah, getting out of his chair and beginning to stretch slowly.

"Well, now tell your ma I thank her for comin', and for them letters from them precious childern. An' see here." Grandma leaned over and pulled out the under drawer of the little stand. It wasn't like giving peppermints to Joel Pepper, and it sent a pang through her at the remembrance, but Peletiah had been good to read those letters.

"I'm a-goin' to give you these," she said, beginning to shake therefrom into her hand three big, white peppermints and two red ones.

"No, I thank you, ma'am," said Peletiah stiffly, and standing quite still.

"Yes, you take 'em," said Grandma decidedly. "You've been real good to read them letters. Here, Peletiah."

"No, I thank you, ma'am," said Peletiah again, not offering to stir. "Well, I must be going," and he went slowly out of the kitchen,

leaving Grandma with the big peppermints in her hand.

That evening, after everything was quiet at the parsonage, the minister called his wife into the study.

"We will look that letter over from Mrs. Fisher, now, my dear."

Mrs. Henderson sat down on the end of the well-worn sofa.

"Lie down, dear," he said, "and let me tuck a pillow under your head. You are all tired out."

"Oh, husband, I am sure you are quite as tired as I am," and the color flew into her cheeks like a girl. But he had his way.

"You better leave the door open"—as he went across the room to close it—"Jerusha may call."

"Jerusha won't need us," he said, and shut it.

"You know the doctor said she was not much hurt, only strained and bruised, and she's quite comfortable now. Well, my dear, now about this letter. Do you think we might take this child?"

"We?" repeated his wife, with wide eyes. "Why, husband!"

"I know it seems a somewhat peculiar thing to propose"—and the parson smiled—"with our two boys and Jerusha."

"Yes," said Mrs. Henderson, "it is, and I never thought seriously of it."

"She won't do Peletiah any harm"—and then he laughed—"and she might brighten him up, if she's the girl Mrs. Fisher's letter indicates. And as for Ezekiel, there's no harm to be thought of in that quarter. Our boys aren't the ones, wife, to be influenced out of their orbits."

"Well, there's Jerusha." Mrs. Henderson brought it out fearfully, and then shut her mouth as if she wished she hadn't said anything.

"I know, dear. You needn't be afraid to speak it out. It is always on my mind. Oh, I do wish——" and the parson began to pace the floor with troubled steps.

His wife threw back the old sofa-blanket with which he had tucked her up, and bounded to his side, passing her hand within his arm.

"Don't, dear," she begged. "Oh, why did I speak!" she cried remorsefully.

"You said no more than what is always on my mind," said the minister again, and he pressed the hand on his arm, looking at it fondly. "Poor Almira!" he said, "I didn't think how hard you would have to work to please her, when I took her here."

"But you couldn't help it, husband," she cried, looking up at him with a world of love. "After your mother died, what place was there for her to go? And she really was good to her."

"Yes," said the minister, and he sighed. "Well, it's done, and she is here; but oh, Almira, I think it's made a great difference with our boys."

Mrs. Henderson's cheek paled, but it wouldn't do to let him see her thoughts further on the subject, he was so worn and tired, so she said:

"Well, about the little girl, husband?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fisher's letter must be answered," said the parson, pulling himself out of his revery. "She asks if we can find a place in Badgertown for this child, who seems uncommonly clever, and is, so she writes, very truthful. And I'm sure, Almira, if Mrs. Fisher says so, the last word has been spoken."

"Yes, indeed," said his wife heartily.

"And they've found out a great deal about her. She's been half starved and cruelly beaten."

The parson's wife hid her tender eyes on her husband's coat sleeve.

"Oh, dear me!" she exclaimed sympathetically.

"And the old woman who pretended to be her grandmother, and who beat her because she wouldn't steal, became frightened at the investigation, and has cleared out, so there is no one to lay a claim to 'Rag.'"

"To whom?" asked Mrs. Henderson, raising her head suddenly.

"Rag—that's the only name the child says she has. But Mrs. Fisher writes they call her Rachel now. You didn't notice that when you read the letter, did you, Almira?"

"No," said his wife, "I didn't have time to read more than part of it. Don't you remember, I hurried over to Grandma Bascom's with the little Pepper letters, and you said you'd talk it over with me when I got home? And then Peletiah came after me, and I ran back here to poor Jerusha."

"Oh, I remember. I shouldn't have asked you." He nodded remorsefully. "Well, then, I'll tell you the rest. You read the first part—how they ran across the girl, and all that?"

"Yes. Oh, dear me! it gives me a shiver now to think what an awful risk that blessed child, Phronsie, ran," cried Mrs. Henderson.

"I know it; I cannot bear to think of it even

in the light of her safety," said Mr. Henderson. "Well, now, Mr. King has taken upon himself to support and to educate Rag—Rachel, I mean —and the best place, at first, at any rate, to put her is Badgertown. Now what do you say, Almira, to her coming here to us?"

The parson's wife hesitated, then said, "Jerusha——" and paused.

"Will she be made unhappy by Jerusha, you mean?" asked the parson.

"Yes."

"No, I don't believe she will," he said decidedly. "You must remember she has had her old 'Gran,' as she calls her, and after that I think she can bear Jerusha."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Henderson, "I forgot. Then I say, husband, we will take this child. I should really love to put the brightness into her life. And please let her come soon." A pretty glow rushed up to her cheek, and the parson's wife actually laughed at the prospect.

VII THE DISAPPOINTMENT

"WILL it stop, Grandpapa?" Phronsie, kneeling on a chair, her face pressed close to the window pane, turned to old Mr. King, looking over her shoulder.

"I'm afraid not, dear," he answered.

"Doesn't God know we want to help the poor children?" she asked suddenly, a surprised look coming into her eyes.

"Yes, yes, dear; of course he knows, child."

"Then why does he let it rain?" cried Phronsie, in a hurt voice.

"Oh, because, Pet, we must have rain, else the flowers wouldn't grow, you know."

"They're all grown," said Phronsie, trying to peer out into the thick twilight between the great splashes of rain running down the window over toward the garden, "and now we can't have our party to-morrow, Grandpapa," she added sorrowfully.

"No, it would be quite too wet, after this

downpour, even if it cleared to-night," said the old gentleman decidedly. "Well, Phronsie, child, we must just accept the matter philosophically."

"What's philo—that big word, Grandpapa?" she asked, turning away from her effort to catch sight of the flower-beds, off in the distance, gay with the wealth of blooms saved for the hoped-for festivities of the morrow, and she put her arm around his neck.

"Oh, that? It was a pretty large word to use to you, and that's a fact," said the old gentleman, with a little laugh. He was having rather a hard time of it to conceal his dismay at the blow to all the plans and preparations so finely in progress for the garden party. "Well, it means we must make the best of it all, and not fret."

"Oh!" said Phronsie. Then she turned back to her window again, and surveyed the driving storm.

"Perhaps the flowers like it," she said, after a pause, when nothing was heard but the beating of the rain against the glass; "maybe they are thirsty, Grandpapa."

"Yes, maybe," assented Grandpapa absently.

"And if God wants it to rain, why we must be glad, mustn't we, Grandpapa, if he *really* wants it?"

"Yes, yes, child," said the old gentleman hastily.

"Then I'm glad," said Phronsie, with a long sigh, and she clambered down from her chair, "and let's find Polly and tell her so, Grandpapa."

Over in the library there was a dismal group. Joel was fighting valiantly with a flood of tears, doubling up his little fists and glaring at Percy and Van at the least intimation of a remark to him. Little Davie had succumbed long ago, and now, crammed up in a small heap in the corner back of the sofa, was rivaling the storm outside, in the flood of tears he supplied.

Jasper crowded his hands in his pockets, marching up and down the long room. Polly, who was swallowing hard, as if her throat hurt her, wouldn't look at one of the boys. Little Dick was openly wailing in his mother's arms.

"Oh, shut up that, kid, will you?" cried Percy, crossly, over at him.

"Percy, Percy," said his mother gently.

"Well, he needn't boo-hoo like a baby," said

Percy; "we've all got to give up the garden party."

"We can't have any garden party," mumbled little Dick between his sobs, and crying all over his mother's pretty blue silk waist.

"There, there, dear," Mrs. Whitney said soothingly "we'll have it the next day, perhaps, Dicky boy."

"Next day is just forever," whimpered little Dick. "Oh, dear! boo-hoo-hoo!"

Percy started an impatient exclamation, thought better of it, and turned on his heel abruptly. But Van burst out:

"And the flowers 'll all be gone, so what's the use of trying to have it then?"

"They won't," cried Joel, in an angry scream, and squaring round at him. "They shan't, so there, Van Whitney!" When the door opened and in walked Mr. King, and Phronsie clinging to his hand.

"Oh, hush, boys!" cried Polly hoarsely, a wave of shame rising in a rosy flush up to her brow. Oh, why hadn't she tried to keep cheerful instead of giving way to the general gloom? And now here were Phronsie and dear Grandpapa, who had ordered "just oceans of flowers"

and everything else. Oh, dear, how naughty she had been! She sprang away from the big, carved table, over to take Phronsie's hand.

"The flowers are thirsty, Polly, I guess," said Phronsie, looking up at her with a smile; "and when they drink all they want to, why, we'll have the party, won't we, Polly?"

"Yes," said Polly, the flush not dying down.

"Then that 'll be nice, I think," said Phronsie, smoothing down her gown in satisfaction, "and I can finish my cushion-pin now"; for there was one little corner still untraveled by the remarkable design observed by the worker. But Mr. Hamilton Dyce had protested he didn't care for any such trifling deficiency, for he could put more pins in that quarter, so he should still be its purchaser.

"So you can," cried Polly, with as much enthusiasm as she could muster, and winking furiously over at the boys.

"And we can write more letters," cried Jasper suddenly, springing over to Phronsie's side.

"Phoo!" exclaimed Joel, "we've got bushels already."

"Well, it's nice to have more yet," retorted Jasper, "so you better keep still, old fellow."

"I shall write some more," announced Van, with great pomposity, strutting up and down the room.

"Hoh-hoh!" laughed Joel, snapping his fingers in derision, "you haven't finished one yet, and beside, who can read your chicken tracks?"

"I have, too," declared Van, very red in the face, ignoring the reflection on his writing and plunging over to Jasper. "Haven't I, Jasper, written a letter for the post office? Say, haven't I?"—gripping him by the jacket-sleeve.

"Yes, you have," said Jasper. "He handed it in this afternoon," he added, nodding to the group.

"There, you see." Van rushed triumphantly up in front of Joel. "You see, Joel Pepper, so you've just got to take that back."

"Well, only one," said Joel, "and there can't any one read it, so that's no good."

"And I wrote some letters," cried Phronsie, running away from the little circle to thrust her face in between the two boys. "I did, all by myself. One, two, ten, I guess."

Little Dick at that stopped sniveling, and slipped off from his mother's lap. "I did, too, write some, ten, three, 'leven, just as many as

you did." The tears trailed off from his red cheeks as he bobbed his head emphatically.

So no one heard quick steps along the hall, and the door being thrown wide by the butler, saying, "They're all in the library." In came Miss Mary Taylor and Mr. Hamilton Dyce.

"We thought we'd drop in," said the gentleman, with a quick glance at Miss Mary, as if to say, "You see, they didn't need us after all, to help cheer up."

"Why, how very jolly you all are!" observed Miss Mary. The rain-drops were glistening on her hair and cheeks, where she had scampered away from the protecting umbrella at the foot of the steps. "Oh, I'm not wet, Mrs. Fisher" —Mother Fisher at this moment coming in with her mending basket. "I left my mackintosh in the hall."

"Well, well," exclaimed Mr. Hamilton Dyce. Joel had left sparring with Van and now swarmed around the newcomer, for he was extremely fond of him. "How are the letters coming on, Jasper? By the way, I've a few belated ones, in the pockets in my coat out in the hall. I'll get them."

"Let me—let me," screamed Joel.

"All right, go ahead. In both side pockets, Joe." He didn't consider it necessary to explain that Miss Taylor and he had been busy driving their pens all the afternoon.

"Whickets!" cried Joel, rushing back, both hands overflowing, "what a lot!"

"Joel, what did you say?" Mother Fisher glanced up, the lines of worry that had settled over her face at the terrible disappointment that had befallen the family, disappearing, now that the usual cheeriness was coming back.

"I didn't mean to," said Joel, the color all over his chubby face, "but my, see what a lot! The post office won't hold 'em all!"

"We'll put them with the others," cried Jasper, "and thank you, oh, so much, Mr. Dyce; we can't have too many. Come on, all of you, and see our pile"—running out into the hall, headed for his den.

"You must thank Miss Mary," said Mr. Dyce.

But Miss Mary laughingly protesting the gratitude was not so much due to her, the whole company filed out after Jasper in great good spirits.

Little Davie, back of the sofa, poked up his head.

"Are they all gone, Mamsie?" he asked fearfully.

"Why, Davie, my boy!" exclaimed Mother Fisher, much startled, and laying down her needle, stuck in a stocking-heel, "I thought you were upstairs with Ben."

"I haven't been with Ben," said David, working his way out, to run and lay his swollen little face in his mother's lap. She cleared away her work, and took him up, to gather him close in her arms.

"There, there, Davie, mother's boy, it's all right"—smoothing the hair away from the hot brow—"we can have the garden party another day, and then perhaps there 'll be all the more pleasure and good time."

"'Tisn't that," said little Davie, wriggling around to look up at her, "but Polly——" and for a moment it seemed as if the floods were to descend again.

"Oh, Polly is all right," said Mrs. Fisher cheerfully.

"Is she, Mamsie?" asked David doubtfully.

"Yes, indeed, and you must see that you keep yourself right. That's all any of us can do," said Mother Fisher. "Now, Davie, my boy,

hop down and run into Jasper's den with the others."

"Oh, I can't, Mamsie," protested Davie, in horror, and burrowing in her arms, "they'll see I've been crying."

"That's the trouble with crying," observed Mother Fisher wisely; "it makes you twice sorry—once when you're doing it, and the next time when it shows. You can't help it now, Davie, so run along. Mother wants you to."

If Mother wanted them to, that was always enough for each of the "Five Little Peppers," so Davie slid slowly down from her lap, and went out and down the hall.

Meantime Miss Mary had taken Polly's arm in the procession to Jasper's den.

"Oh, Polly, how cheery you have made them!" she exclaimed. "We expected to see you all perhaps drowned in tears."

"Oh, I haven't done it—anything to make them happy," cried Polly, the wave of color again flooding her cheeks; "indeed I haven't, Miss Mary. I've been bad and wicked and horrid," she said penitently, her head drooping.

"Oh, no, Polly," protested Miss Mary, her arm around Polly's waist.

"Yes I have, Miss Mary, I——"

"Well, don't let us talk now about it; we will look at the letters." Miss Mary drew her within the den. There stood Jasper behind the table perfectly overflowing with epistles of every sort and size, while little packages, and some not so very little, either, filled up all the receptacles possible for mail matter.

"Oh, my, what a lot!" exclaimed everybody, as Joel with a dash precipitated his handfuls on the already long-suffering pile.

"This is only the beginning," laughed Jasper, waving his arms over, to compass the whole den. "Just look on the top of the bookcase, will you?"

Everybody whirled around.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Grandpapa, at the sight. Letters were scattered here and there in the thickest of piles all along the surface, while the Chinese vase had a whole handful poking up their faces as if to say, "Here we are, all the way from China."

"Dear me," exclaimed old Mr. King again, "when do you ever expect to sell all those, Jasper?"

"Mine is in there," announced Phronsie,

hanging to his hand and pointing to the vase. "Grandpapa, it really is; Japser put it there."

"Did he, Pet?" cried the old gentleman, immensely interested.

"Yes, he did truly," said Phronsie, bobbing her head emphatically. "I saw him my own self, Grandpapa. *And it's to you.*" She stood on her tiptoes and whispered the last bit of information.

"No, is it?" cried Grandpapa, highly gratified; and, lifting her up to a level with his face, he kissed her on both cheeks. "Now, Phronsie, I shall always keep that letter," he said, as he set her down.

"Shall you?" cried Phronsie, smoothing her gown with great satisfaction. "Then I'm so glad I wrote it, Grandpapa."

Over by the table Jasper was saying to Polly:

"Now what shall we do with this dreadfully long evening? Do hurry and think, Polly, before everybody gets dismal again."

"Oh, I don't know," said Polly, at her wit's end.

"But we must think of something," said Jasper desperately, and fumbling the letters.

Polly's eye fell on his restless fingers.

"We might sort them out, the letters, and tie them up in little packages to take out to the post office."

"The very thing!" cried Jasper enthusiastically. "Here, all you good people"—he whirled around—"if you want to help, please sit down, and we'll get this mess of letters sorted and tied up into bundles." He waved his hands over his head, and of course everybody stopped talking at once.

"Oh, whickets!" Joel screamed; then he caught Polly's eye, and his chubby face took on a lively red. "Let me—let me!" He crammed himself in between Jasper and the table.

"Hold on!" commanded Jasper, "not so fast, Joe," and he seized Joel's brown hands just grabbing a big pile.

"Wait till Jasper tells us how to begin," said Polly, her brown eyes dancing at the prospect of something to do.

"Oh, dear!" whimpered Joel, stamping in his impatience. The Whitney boys were crowding up close behind. "Do hurry up, Jasper," they teased.

"Well, how shall we begin, Polly?" Jasper wrinkled up his brows in perplexity.

"Let's ask Miss Mary," said Polly. So Jasper called, "Miss Mary!" but she didn't seem to hear, which perhaps wasn't so very strange, after all, as Mr. Dyce was telling her something which must have been very interesting, over in the corner. When at last the summons reached her, she came hurrying over with very pink cheeks. "Oh, what can I do to help?"

"We've been calling and calling for ever so long," said Joel, in a very injured tone, for he had added his voice when he saw that things were waiting for Miss Taylor.

"Oh, have you, Joel? That's too bad." Miss Mary's cheeks became pinker than ever.

"Well, you are always screaming over something, Joe, you beggar"—Mr. Dyce pulled his ear—"so it's no wonder that your cries are not attended to on the instant."

When Miss Mary saw what was wanted of her, she proposed that Jasper give out twelve letters to each person, who should tie them up neatly, and put in a big basket. Then they would be ready to take out to the post office in the Wistaria arbor, and to be sorted into the little boxes which Grandpapa had commissioned the carpenter to make all up and down the sides, leav-

ing one end free for the delivery window. The door for the postmaster and his assistants was to be at the opposite corner.

"Oh, yes, how nice!" exclaimed Polly, hopping up and down as ecstatically as Phronsie ever did. "Jasper, I'll get a ball of twine," and she was flying off.

"No, you stay here and help me give out the letters," said Jasper.

"Oh, I want to do that," cried Joel, squeezing and crowding.

"No, you must get the big basket," said Jasper. "Go and ask Thomas to give you one."

"I don't want to get an old basket," whined Joel; "let Percy get it."

"Hoh! I'm not going to," declared Percy, drawing himself up in great state.

"Then I will go myself," said Jasper, flinging down a handful of letters, to hurry off.

"Joel," said Polly, in a sorry little voice, and turning away from the table, "now you will spoil everything, and we've just got to feeling good. How can you, Joey!"

"I didn't mean——" began Joel, turning his back on her, while he winked very hard, "I didn't mean to, Polly."

Percy dug the toe of his shoe into the rug, and looked down on the floor.

"Then run after Jasper," cried Polly; "hurry, and tell him so."

"I will," cried Joel, plunging off, and Percy, being left alone, as Van had slid away to another group when he saw how things were going on, concluded to follow. And presently Jasper came back.

"It's all right, Polly," he nodded brightly to her, and they fell to work.

And in a minute or two, Joel came back with Percy, carrying the basket, a big market affair, between them. And when he saw what fun they were having over it, for they were both laughing merrily, Van wished he had gone.

And seeing his dismal face, Jasper sent him after a ball of twine. And then Phronsie wanted to get something, and little Dick teased to go too, so Grandpapa suggested they should go after some extra pairs of scissors.

"And Mamsie will let us take hers out of her workbasket, I guess," cried Phronsie. "Let us ask her, Grandpapa dear."

"Oh, you better stop working, Mrs. Fisher." Old Mr. King popped his white head in at the

library door. There sat Mother Fisher by the table, mending away as usual, for the stockings never seemed to be quite done. "And come into Jasper's den and see how fine we all are!" he added gayly.

"Yes, Mamsie, do come," chirped Phronsie, running her head in between him and the door-casing to plead.

"Yes, Mamsie, do come," echoed little Dick, who would do and say everything that Phronsie did.

"You see, you've simply got to come," laughed Grandpapa.

"And may we have your scissors, Mamsie?" Phronsie now deserted old Mr. King, to run over to the big workbasket.

"My scissors?" repeated Mother Fisher. "Why, Phronsie, child, what are you going to do with them?"

"We're going to cut letters," said Phronsie, with an important air, her fingers already in the basket, which, standing on tiptoe, she had pulled quickly over toward her in her eagerness. "And may we have your scissors, Mamsie?"

"Take care," warned Mother Fisher, but too late. Over went the big basket, and away rat-

tled all the things, having a perfectly beautiful time by themselves over the library floor.

"Bless me!" ejaculated old Mr. King, while little Dick laughed right out.

Phronsie stood quite still, the color all out of her round cheeks. Then her bosom heaved, and she darted over to lay her head in Mother Fisher's lap.

"Oh, I didn't mean to, Mamsie," she wailed.

"Oh, deary me! bless me!" exclaimed Grandpapa, in the greatest consternation, and leaning over the two.

"There, there, don't mind it, deary." Mother Fisher was smoothing the yellow hair.

"Take me, Mamsie," begged Phronsie, holding up both hands, and she burrowed her face deeper yet in Mrs. Fisher's lap.

"Oh, dear me!" old Mr. King kept exclaiming. Then he pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his face violently. This not making him feel any better, he kept exclaiming, "Oh, dear me!" at intervals.

"I'll pick 'em up," said little Dick cheerfully, beginning to race after the spools and things over the floor.

Mother Fisher had drawn Phronsie up to her

bosom, where she cuddled her to her heart's content. "Now, child," she said, after a minute, "I think you ought to help to pick up the things and put them in the basket. See how nicely Dicky is doing it."

"I'm getting all the spools," announced Dick, jamming all the chairs aside that he could move, and lifting a very hot face. "Yes, sir-ee! Come, Phronsie."

"I think you ought to help him, Phronsie."

So Phronsie slipped out of her mother's lap obediently, and wiped off her tears.

"Come on," said little Dick, in great glee. "I'm going under the table; there's a lot under there."

And in shorter time than it takes to tell it, the spools, and mending cotton, and tape measure, and, dear me! the ever-so-many things of which Mrs. Fisher's big workbasket was always full, were all collected from the nice time they were having on the floor, and snugly set up in their places again. And Mother Fisher, escorted by the children and old Mr. King, who by this time was laughing quite gayly once more, was going out into the hall, on the way to Jasper's den. And Phronsie had the big cutting-out

shears, and little Dick the smaller, little snipping-thread scissors.

"Hullo!" Mr. King called out, as the butler ushered into the hall two gentlemen, in dripping mackintoshes. "Now that's fine, Cabot and Alstyne, to drop in of this dismal evening."

"We've called to condole with you all," said both gentlemen, as they were divested of their wet garments, "but it doesn't seem as if our services were needed"—with a glance at Grandpapa and his group.

"Oh, my family gets over any little disappointment such as bad weather," observed the old gentleman, with pride. "Well, come this way, the principal object of interest is in Jasper's den; no need to announce it"—as the peals of laughter and chatter sounded down the long hall.

VIII THE GARDEN PARTY

AND so, after all, it turned out to be the very best thing that the garden party did not take place until two days after, for all was then as sweet and fresh as a rose—all but one thing. And that was, on the very morning of the eventful day, Mrs. Chatterton drove up.

But then, as Jasper observed to Polly when this dire news was announced, "Cousin Eunice was always turning up when least wanted." And Polly had, as usual, to keep back her own thoughts on the subject, to comfort him. It would never do to add to his dismay.

"Why she can't stay in Europe when she's everlastingly saying that there is no place in America to compare with it, I don't, for my part, see," he cried, in a pet.

"I suppose she wants to be with her relations, Jasper," said Polly, with a sigh.

"Relations?"—Jasper turned suddenly on his heel and thrust his hands deeply in his pockets—

"well, she fights with every single one of them," he said savagely.

"Oh, Jasper—fights!" exclaimed Polly, in horror, whose great grief had always been at having no relations, so to speak. "Dear me, how very dreadful!"

"Well, you know she does," said Jasper gloomily, and squaring round—"always picking and carping at something or somebody; and now Father will be all upset by her. If she had only waited till to-morrow!"

Polly felt such a dreadful sinking of her heart just then, that for a minute she didn't speak. There didn't seem to be any comfort for this.

"And just think how good Father has been," went on Jasper, too miserable to keep still, "and all those flowers he had ordered, for of course he couldn't let the florists suffer, and that he sent to the hospitals when it poured so."

"I know it," said Polly, swallowing hard.

"And now he has ordered another lot, and everything else—why, you know, Polly, there isn't anything Father hasn't done to make this fair a success, and now *she* has come!" Jasper flung himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, Jasper," cried Polly, running over to him in the greatest distress, "don't! Oh, dear me! What can we do?"

"Nothing," said Jasper, in the depths of gloom; "nothing will do any good so long as she has come."

"Oh, there must something be done," declared Polly quite wildly, and feeling equal to anything. If she only knew what would avail! "*Hush, here comes Grandpapa!*"

"Oh, he mustn't see us feeling badly." Jasper sprang from his chair. "Come, Polly," and they flew out into the side hall.

"Now where are those two, Polly and Jasper?" said old Mr. King to himself, coming to the library in a great state of irritation. "I've searched this house for them, and nobody seems to have the least idea where they have gone. Polly! Jasper!" he cried loudly, and it wasn't a very pleasant voice, either.

"Oh, dear!" Jasper seized Polly's hands in a corner of the hall. "He's calling us, and we've got to go, Polly, and how we look, you and I! Whatever shall we do!"

"But we must go," breathed Polly. Then she looked up into Jasper's face. "Let's ask him to

go out and help us fix the flowers," she cried suddenly.

Jasper gave her a keen glance. "All right," he said. "Come on," and before their resolution had time to cool itself, they rushed into the library.

"Oh, Grandpapa," they both cried together, "do come out and tell us how to fix the flowers."

"Hey?" The old gentleman whirled around from the table, where he had begun to throw the papers about. "Did you know Mrs. Chatterton had come back?" He glared at them over his spectacles, which he had forgotten to remove when he had been interrupted with the unwelcome news while peacefully reading the morning paper.

"Yes—oh, yes," said Jasper.

"Oh, yes, we know it," cried Polly cheerfully, "but, Grandpapa, we want you"—tugging at his hand.

"Hey? you knew it?" The old gentleman's tone softened, and he suffered himself to be led toward the door. "And you want me, eh?"—feeling with every step as if life, after all, might be worth living.

"Yes, we do indeed, Father," cried Jasper

affectionately, possessing himself of the other hand.

"And oh, the flowers you sent are just too lovely for anything!" cried Polly, dancing away along by his side. "They're gorgeous, Grandpapa dear."

"Are they so?" Grandpapa beamed at her, all his happiness returned. "So you want me to tell you how to arrange them, eh?" And his satisfaction in being appealed to was so intense that he held his head high. "Well, come on," and he laughed gayly.

Mrs. Chatterton, newly arrived in the handsome suite of apartments Cousin Horatio's hospitality always allowed her, looked out of the window, and, having no one else to confide her opinions to, was not averse to chatting with her French maid.

"Isn't it perfectly absurd, Hortense, to see that old man?—and to think how particular and aristocratic he used to be! Why, I can remember when he would hardly let Jasper speak to him in some of his moods, and now just see that beggar girl actually holding his hand, and he laughing with her."

"A beggaire, is it?" cried Hortense, dropping

the gown she was brushing, to run to the window. "I see no beggaire, madame"—craning her neck.

"You needn't drop your work," said Mrs. Chatterton, with asperity, "just because I made a simple remark. You know quite well whom I mean, Hortense. It's that Polly Pepper I'm speaking of."

"She is not a beggaire, madame," declared Hortense pertly, opening her black eyes very wide. "Oh!" She extended her hands and burst into a series of shrill cackles. "Why, she's like all de oder children in dis house, and I think truly, madame, de best."

"Go back to your work, I say," commanded Mrs. Chatterton, in a fury, forgetting herself enough to stamp her foot. So Hortense picked up the gown, but she continued to cackle softly to herself, with now and then a furtive glance at her mistress.

Outside, with all the sunny influence of the summer morning upon him, old Mr. King, and Polly, and Jasper went about, superintending the placing of the flowers. For there seemed to be a great many in the pots, with ferns and palms, to distribute where they would best show off and

be persuaded to swell the poor children's fund.

"Oh, Grandpapa dear! what richness!" sighed Polly, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "I do think I never saw so many, and such beauties. Only look, Jasper, at that azalea!"

"I know it," said Jasper, his eyes sparkling, "and those orchids, Polly!"

"Oh, I know—I know," said Polly, spinning about to take it all in. Old Mr. King put back his head and laughed to see her.

"I'm so glad you like it, Polly, my girl," he said, heartily pleased.

"Like it, Grandpapa!" repeated Polly, standing quite still. "Oh, it's just too beautiful!" and she clasped her hands tightly together.

"Well, I think we'd best get to work," said Jasper, bursting into a laugh. "Come on, Polly, let's set about it."

"I think so, too," said Polly, coming out of her rapture. Thereupon ensued such a busy time!—especially as old Turner and two of his under-gardeners came up for directions, and Mr. King went off with them. So for the next hour Polly seemed to be on wings, here, there,

and everywhere, and breathing only the sweet fragrance of the flowers.

"How Phronsie would enjoy it—the fixing and all!" she mourned, in the midst of it, as the transforming of the flower-tables into veritable bowers of beauty went on.

"But you know she had to take a long nap, else she would be all tired out. And the afternoon is going to be a long one, Polly."

"Oh, I know," said Polly, flying on with her work faster than ever, "and Mamsie was right to make her go to sleep."

"Mrs. Fisher is always right," said Jasper decidedly, "ever and always."

"Isn't she!" cried Polly, in a glow. "Well, Jasper, do you think that smilax ought to be trained up there?" She twisted her head to view the effect, and looked up at him anxiously.

"Yes—no," said Jasper critically; "I don't believe I'd put it there. It looks too much, Polly; there are so many vines about."

"So it does," said Polly, in great relief. "Heigh-ho! when one is working over any thing it looks so different, doesn't it?"

"I should say so," cried Jasper. "Oh,

Polly, it can't ever in all this world be twelve o'clock."

"It can't!" exclaimed Polly, in dismay. But there was one of the white-capped maids coming across the lawn, with the summons to go in to luncheon, which was to be served at an earlier hour than usual.

And after that, no one had more than a moment in which to think, for at three o'clock the garden party was to open, and the fair to be in full progress.

Long before that time, the avenues and streets leading out to the Horatio King estate were thronged with children of all ages and sizes; most of them with their nurse-maids, all bound to the scene of the garden party, their small purses dangling by chains from their arms, or carried carefully in their hands. For wasn't this to help poor children who didn't have any pleasant homes, but lived in stuffy tenement houses, to go out into the broad, beautiful country, where they could race in the fields and play with the chickens, and pick all the flowers they wanted to? And so, ever since the announcement had been made that such a fund was to be raised, there had been much hoarding of pen-

nies, and no slight self-denial on the part of the younger element, who would naturally be drawn into the plan.

All the society people were to drive up later; and until the early evening hours it was to be the function of the town, which every one was anxious to attend. But everybody in Mr. King's household was to be ready to receive, exactly at three o'clock.

Phronsie was in the highest of spirits, having Grandpapa's hand to cling to, trying to welcome all the guests, and keeping one eye out to see that Rachel was enjoying herself, attired in a pretty, pink cambric gown, her black hair—which now seemed, oh, so soft and pretty!—tied back with little pink bows. And Rachel's eyes —well, there! no one would ever have suspected that they had only been accustomed to the squalor of Gran's apartment, and Gran herself, but one short week ago. They now looked on the world in general, and this fair scene in particular, with all the nonchalance of one born and brought up in the midst of such conditions as could bring about a state of affairs like the present that surrounded her. And many asked, "Who is that child?" for it was clearly seen

that she wasn't of the set that was thronging the grounds.

Rachel herself was wholly unconscious of the remarks that were being made, so she devoted her heart and soul to the duty assigned to her, that of waiting on Polly and her bevy of school friends in one of the flower-bowers. And she never bothered about any curious glances, or asides, until a chance remark struck her ear as she was hurrying across the lawn, which she thought needed attention; then she raised her head, and her black eyes grew sharp and intent. It was Mrs. Chatterton who was speaking.

"Yes, it's a little beggar girl he took in," and the cackle was unpleasant that accompanied the words. "Dear me! I expect she'll rob us all; such creatures are so sly." She was pointing out Rachel to one of her friends lately arrived from Europe, and who had exerted herself to come early and see the children.

"Do you mean me?" demanded Rachel, her black eyes, like gimlets, on the long, cynical face. "'Cause if you does, I can tell you that what I does, I does right out on top; an' I guess by the looks o' you, that ain't your style."

"You impertinent creature!" exclaimed Mrs.

Chatterton, her long face crimson with passion, not allayed by seeing that her friend could with difficulty control her amusement. "She'll tell this everywhere," she fumed within. "I shall go and speak to my cousin, Mr. King, about you, girl." She moved her arm and shapely hand, both very beautiful still, and well exhibited on every occasion, and started off with great dignity.

"I would," said Rachel scornfully. Then she laughed, "Oh, me! oh, my! you're such a favor*ite*, you are!" and she doubled up her thin figure, and went off in a little gust of merriment.

"Come with me." Mrs. Chatterton darted back and seized her friend's arm to drag her away. "That detestable creature makes me feel quite faint."

As soon as they had disappeared down a winding path, Rachel's amusement quite left her. She drew herself up stiffly, and hurried back to Polly, to be the same quiet, attentive, deft little maiden as before.

"You do tie flowers up so beautifully," cried Polly, handing her another big spool of baby ribbon. "Doesn't she, girls?"

"Yes, indeed," cried ever so many.

"I can't tie a bow to save myself," declared Alexia; "it all snarls up, and it looks for all the world, when I get through, as if my dog had chewed it. Oh, dear me! Yes, that basket is two dollars."

"I'll take it," said the little tot who had to stand on tiptoes to peer over the table with its blooming beauty. "I want it for my mamma," and he gave his smart little cane to the nursemaid to hold, while he opened his purse.

"Well, it's a beauty, Rick," said Alexia, picking up the basket; "the violets are so sweet," and she sniffed them two or three times as she passed them over.

"Here's Rick Halliday," called Clem, at the other end of the table. "Now I'm going to make him buy something of me. We must all make him, girls; his father's given him oceans of money to spend, of course."

It was loud enough for Polly to hear, and she dropped the box of ribbon under the table.

"No, no," she said decidedly, hurrying over, "Grandpapa said we were not to ask a single person to buy. That's the rule, you know, Clem."

"We could make ever so much more," grumbled Clem; "it's for the poor children, you know, Polly."

"Grandpapa said not," repeated Polly, her cheeks like a rose, and back she flew again to her post.

"I shan't buy anything of you, Clem Forsythe," loudly declared small Rick over to her, taking his little cane from the nursemaid's hand, "anyway. And beside, my papa said if any one teased me to spend my money, I was to come right away. But he didn't believe they would here." And with his basket of flowers for his mother, he moved off with great dignity across the lawn, swinging his cane as he had noticed the men did.

"Of all kids, I do think that Rick Halliday is the most detestable infant," exclaimed Clem, in great discomfort. "Oh, yes, Mrs. Nunn"—her face brightening—"we have heliotrope, ever so much of it." She thrust her hands into a big vase overflowing with fragrance. "How many? Oh, three dozen sprays. Yes, indeed."

And the bands—one at the end of the big lawn, and the other on the terrace at the farther side of the house—were playing their sweetest; and now

"But this is ten dollars," said Joel.

the society folk began to put in an appearance among the throngs of children. Everybody was in gala attire, and the garden party was at its height.

"Joel," cried Mr. Cabot to that individual, rushing in and out among the little knots of gayly dressed visitors, "here, run over to the post office, will you, and see if there are any letters for me?"

"All right," Joel cried, as he flew along. And in an incredibly short space of time, back he rushed with three missives.

"How much?"

"Ten cents apiece," said Joel promptly. "I'll get change in a minute," and he was flying off again with the bill thrust into his hand.

"I don't take any change here. I don't want any; I won't be bothered with it," declared Mr. Cabot, in his most decided fashion.

"But this is ten dollars," said Joel, aghast, and stopping short to flap the bill.

"Never mind, that's my affair; go along, or I'll report you. Aren't you one of the postmen?"—pointing sternly to his badge.

"Yes," said Joel, straightening up, and puffing out his chubby cheeks with pride.

"Well, then, you'll find yourself reported if you don't march," cried Mr. Cabot. "So off with yourself to the postmaster."

"Come on, Joel," called another of the postmen, who happened to be Percy, rushing along. "I'm going to get my mail bag now, there's just a crowd of folks waiting over there for letters"—pointing over to the pine grove.

"So will I get mine," shouted Joel, "and see here"—waving his ten-dollar bill—"what Mr. Cabot sent to Jasper. I guess that 'll send one poor child off into the country, Percy Whitney! Won't that be prime!"

There was such a crowd around the Wistaria-arbor post office, that Percy and Joel, who much preferred being letter-carriers to helping Jasper within, had to crawl in under the vines, to find the mail bags.

"Here, Jasper," cried Joel, "take it, do"—throwing the ten-dollar bill down in a flurry, to fling the strap of his mail bag over his head before Percy should get his in order.

But Jasper, who was trying to satisfy the demands of a throng of people all clamoring at the small window for letters, didn't see it, or even hear his name called. So the ten-dollar bill lay

perfectly still where it fell, until it got all tired out, and a little puff of wind, sweeping through the arbor, blew it first to one side, and then to the other, until at last it fell down among a tangle of evergreen with which the posts of the arbor were wound. And presently, Van, who much preferred being assistant to Jasper to running about as a letter carrier, came along and exclaimed, "Oh, that silly old green stuff! It takes up so much room!" And he twitched off a lot of it, and the ten-dollar bill, well crumpled up inside of the bunch, sighed and said to itself as it was flung under the counter, "Now I guess I'm dead and buried forever."

Meanwhile, Joel, as happy as a lark at the thought of Mr. Cabot's contribution, went off on the wings of the wind, distributing letters, here, there, and everywhere, and receiving lots of orders.

It was, "Oh, Joel, get me a letter,"

And, "Joel, get me one; I can't get near the post office; there's a perfect mob there,"

And, "Joel Pepper!"—from clear across the lawn—"come over here; Mrs. Singleton wants to see you about some letters," until Joel began to feel that he was about running the whole

post-office department, and it seemed as if every drop of blood was in his chubby face, he was so hot. But he never thought of being tired, he was so happy, plunging on.

"Oh, my gracious, honey! you done mos' knocked de bref out o' me!" It was Candace, who had left her little shop on Temple Place to help forward the garden party, against whom he had come up, careless where he was going.

IX THE TEN-DOLLAR BILL

"OH, I'm so sorry!" Joel brought himself up remorsefully, trying to recover the collection of rag dolls sent spinning from her black arms.

"An' dey were sech perfec' beauties!" mourned Candace, twisting her hands sorrowfully together. "Oh, me! oh, my!"

"They aren't hurt a bit," declared Joel stoutly, precipitating the whole collection unceremoniously at her. "There they are, every single one, as nice as ever!"

"Take care," warned Candace. "Oh, my soul and body!" she mourned, "dey're all mussed up."

"You can comb it out," said Joel, longing to comfort, and forgetting it was wool from Candace's own head.

"And what 'll Mis' Cabot and Mis' Alstyne say?" groaned Candace. Then she sat right down on the grass and began to pick at the dolls

discontentedly. "W'y couldn't you 'a' looked whar you're goin', Mas'r Joel?"

"Have Mrs. Alstyne and Mrs. Cabot bought those dolls?" cried Joel, pointing a brown finger at them. "Oh, dear me!" He just saved himself from exclaiming, "Those horrors!"

"Yes," said Candace, smoothing a woolly head in great distress, "but I dunno 's they'll want 'em now, dey've been shook up so and spilt on de groun'—oh, dear me!"

"Joel, aren't you coming with that letter bag?" and, "Joel Pepper, hurry up!" The cries were now so insistent that Joel dashed away, stopped, and rushed back tumultuously. "Oh, Candace, I'm so sorry!" He flung himself down on the grass by her side. Distress was written so plainly all over his hot face that Candace stopped in her work over the dolls to turn and regard him.

"Bress yer heart, honey," she cried, now as much worried over Joel as she had been about the dolls, "dey ain't hurt a mite—not a single grain," she added emphatically.

"Oh, Candace, are you sure?" he exclaimed delightedly.

"Not a mite," protested Candace, bobbing her

own woolly head in a decided fashion. "Dear me! now I'm afraid I discomberated my turban, an' it's my spick an' span comp'ny one Mr. King give me for this yere berry occasion," and she put up both black hands to feel of it anxiously. Joel jumped to his feet and ran all around the big figure to get the most comprehensive view.

"It's all right, Candace," he reported, in great satisfaction.

"Sure, honey?" she asked doubtfully.

"Yes, yes," declared Joel quickly, prancing up in front of her. "I like you, Candace; you're just as nice as can be."

"Den gimme your hands!"—she laid the rag dolls carefully on the grass, and put out both of her black ones—"and hoist me up, honey, dat's a good chile."

So Joel stuck out his brown hands, and Candace laying hold of them, he tugged, very red in the face, till finally she set her ample gaiters on the ground and stood straight.

Up rushed Van.

"They're complaining at the post office," he squealed. "You've got to give me your bag. Folks can't get their letters. Give me the bag." He thrust out both hands.

Joel turned on him in a fury.

"You aren't going to have my bag," he screamed.

"I am, too; you're so slow, and don't give out the letters," said Van, delighted to find some chance to get the best of Joel, and quite important to be sent with a message to such an effect.

"You shan't either; I ain't slow," cried Joel, answering both statements at once, and whirling around in an endeavor to keep the bag at his back. But Van flew for it, disdaining to waste more time over arguments.

Candace stretched out a large, black hand. "See here, now, Mas'r Van, leggo dat bag." She seized him by the jacket collar with such a grip that he dismissed all thoughts of the mail bag, his one concern now being to get free from Candace.

"Ow!" he screamed, wriggling violently. "I don't want the mail bag; let me go, Candace, do!"

"See," cried little Dick, half across the lawn, to a merry party of ladies and gentlemen, who turned to follow the pointing of the small finger toward Candace and her capture.

"Oh, let me go," cried Van, very red in the face at this, and trying to duck behind her big figure, "*please*, Candace."

"Let him go," begged Joel, just as much distressed; "he won't touch the bag, I don't believe, again, Candace."

"Oh, I won't, I won't," promised Van wildly. "I don't want the bag; do let me go, Candace."

"Yer see, Mas'r Joel was a-helpin' me," said Candace, slowly releasing Van's jacket collar, "an' 'twarn't none 'o his fault dat he stopped kerryin' de letters." But Van was off from under her open fingers and shot across the green in the opposite direction from little Dick and his party.

"Now I'll take my dolls to de ladies," observed Candace, bundling them up in her clean, checked apron. She sent a satisfied glance after Joel, making quick time toward the post office, then waddled off.

"Boy!" called a fine, imperious voice, as Joel dashed by a group of ladies and gentlemen. As there wasn't any other boy in sight, he might be supposed to be the one wanted; but Joel by this time was frantic to get to the post office, and with his mind filled with mortification and dis-

tress at his delay from his duty, he paid no heed to the call, now repeated more insistently.

"It's a lady," then said Joel to himself, "so I must go back. Oh, dear me!" He wheeled abruptly, and, hot and red-faced, plunged up to the group.

"What is it, ma'am?" Then he saw to his disgust that it was Mrs. Chatterton. She was surrounded by friends whom she had met abroad.

"Why didn't you come when I bade you?" she exclaimed arrogantly. "Don't you know it's your place to serve me?"

"No, ma'am," said Joel bluntly, his black eyes fixed on her face. One or two of the gentlemen turned aside with a laugh.

"What, you little beggar!" Mrs. Chatterton said it between her teeth, furious at the amusement of her friends, but Joel heard.

"I'm not a beggar," he declared hotly, and squaring his shoulders. By this time he forgot all about the mail bag. "And you haven't any right to say so"—with flashing eyes.

Mrs. Chatterton, now seeing him worked up, recovered herself and smiled sweetly. She leaned back in her garden chair and swung her parasol daintily back and forth.

"Oh, yes, you are," she declared; "we all know it, so there is no use in your denying it. Well, you get us some ices and be quick about it." She dismissed him with a wave of her beautiful arm, in its flowing, lace drapery.

But Joel did not budge.

"You don't know it." He swept the whole group with his black eyes. "It isn't as she says, is it?"

"No," said one of the gentlemen who had laughed, whirling around to bring a very sharp pair of eyes on Joel's face, "it isn't, my boy."

"Well, I must say," protested Mrs. Chatterton, an angry light coming into her cold eyes, and turning around on him sharply, "that this isn't very friendly in you, Mr. Vandeusen, to pit that upstart boy against me. Now there will be no managing him hereafter."

"Well, but, Mrs. Chatterton," broke in one of the other gentlemen, in a propitiatory voice, and leaning over her chair, Mr. Vandeusen turning calmly on his heel to survey the distant lawns through his monocle, "a beggar, don't you know—well, it isn't the pleasantest thing in the world to be called that, don't you know?"

"Particularly when one isn't a beggar," said

a young lady hotly. Then she turned to Joel and laid a hand on his arm. "Don't you mind it," she said.

"And as for you, Miss Tresor, I should consider it wiser for you to be silent." Mrs. Chatterton turned on her with venom. "What do you know about these miserable Peppers that infest my cousin's house, pray tell?"

"I like them," declared Miss Tresor decidedly, not turning her head. "Don't mind it, my lad."

"I don't, now," said Joel. Then the gentlemen laughed again.

"Oh, I must go." All his long neglect of his letter-carrier duties, made so much worse by this delay, now surged over him. He raised his chubby face, over which a smile ran, and bounded off.

"Isn't he a dear!" exclaimed Miss Tresor impulsively.

"Come away, Emily," begged another young lady, seizing Miss Tresor's arm, "the old cat is quite furious; just look at her face."

"We'll leave her to mamma's tender mercies," said Emily carelessly, "she knows how to handle her. Do you remember that scene, Elinor, at Geneva?"

"Don't I!" laughed Elinor, as they sauntered off.

Well, by the time that six o'clock came, there wasn't so much as a scrap of a letter left in Jasper's post office, but, instead, a box crammed full of silver pieces and banknotes. And Miss Mary Taylor and Mr. Hamilton Dyce, and some other young ladies and gentlemen whom they drilled into the service, shut themselves up in the library and wrote as fast as ever they could make their pens fly over the paper, till little white piles appeared on the table. And Percy and Joel and Van and the other boys would rush in for these same piles to put them in the post office, to earn more money, to go into the big box. So back and forth ran these letter carriers, until even Miss Mary threw down her pen.

"I can't write another word," she cried. "I've exhausted everything I can think of. I don't want to see another letter!"

And then a card was put up outside the Wistaria arbor, "Post Office Closed." And everybody who still had money, was anxious to spend it before going home; so it was just lavished on the flower-bowers, the fancy-work table, and the candy shop.

And then, when there wasn't anything more to be bought or sold, the bands moved down nearer to the center of the big lawn, making the gay little groups all move back, leaving a broad, smooth surface, for the affair was to end in dancing on the green.

Meanwhile Grandpapa was gallantly offering his arm to Madam Dyce, and leading her up to an esplanade on the upper terrace, and, word being spread about that all the guests were expected to follow, there they found seats and little tables and a bevy of waiters to serve a delicious supper. And here the dancing on the green below by the young people could be seen in all its gayety, the setting sun casting bright gleams upon the merry scene.

"Dear me! shouldn't you think those young people would be tired enough after all they have worked," observed the old gentleman, leaning back in his comfortable chair, "to sit still and take it easy with us here?"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Madam Dyce, "my old feet are actually twitching under my gown to dance too."

"In that case," observed old Mr. King most gallantly, "let me lead you down, and will you

give me the honor?" He bent his white hair to the level of her hand.

"No, indeed," laughed Madam Dyce; "I will leave the field for the young people. But it carries me back to my youth, when you and I did dance many a time together, Horatio."

"Did we not?" laughed Grandpapa, too. And then up came some merry groups, tired of dancing, after some supper, when down they would go again, fortified and refreshed, to begin it all over once more. At last, even the lingering ones were obliged to say good-bye. The evening had shut in and the brilliant garden party was a thing of the past. The King household was resting and talking it all over on the spacious veranda, luxurious in its cushions and rugs, its easy-chairs and hammocks.

"Oh, it has been so perfectly beatific!" exclaimed Polly, in a rapture. She was curled up on the top step, her head in Grandpapa's lap, who was ensconced in a big chair with Phronsie's tired little face snuggled up on his breast. "Hasn't it, Alexia?" For Alexia was going to stay over night.

"Oh, my!" Alexia gave a sigh and squeezed Polly's hand. "I never had such a good time

in all my life, Polly Pepper," she declared. "The poor children won't begin to get the fun out of it that we've had."

"Oh, those dear poor children!" exclaimed Polly, stretching out her toes, which now began to ache dreadfully; "just think how perfectly lovely it's going to be for them all summer, Alexia."

Joel caught the last words. He poked up his head from one of the hammocks.

"Well, I guess Mr. Cabot has helped a poor child to go into the country," he cried, in a pleased tone.

"I guess everybody has helped," observed Ben, "the way your letters went, Jasper! Who would think so many could have been sold!"

Jasper stopped pulling Prince's ears.

"Didn't they go!" he cried, in huge satisfaction.

"I guess you were glad to get that big bill, Jasper," shouted Joel. "My, wasn't he good to send it!"

"Eh?" asked Jasper. Everybody was chatting and laughing, so it wasn't strange that things couldn't be heard the first time. So Joel shouted it again, glad to be allowed to scream

such a splendid contribution over and over. "The big bill, wasn't it prime, Jasper!"

"What are you talking about, Joe?" cried Jasper, stopping his play with Prince, as he saw Joel was terribly in earnest over something.

"Why, the big bill I gave you, that Mr. Cabot sent. Hurrah! Wasn't it fine!" Joel kicked up his heels and emitted a whistle that made Polly clap her hands over her ears.

"What big bill?" exclaimed Jasper. "What on earth are you talking about, Joe?"

Joel tumbled out of the hammock and took long leaps across the piazza floor, which landed him in front of Jasper.

"Why, that ten-dollar bill I gave you that Mr. Cabot sent to the post office," he said, in a breath.

"You didn't give me any ten-dollar bill," said Jasper, all in a puzzle; "you've been dreaming, Joe."

"I—I laid it down right by you." Joe could only gasp the words now.

"I didn't see it," said Jasper.

X TROUBLE FOR JOEL

THERE was an awful pause, for everybody caught the last words. Joel slid to the floor in a little heap. Mrs. Chatterton spoke up quickly.

"It's easy enough to see where it went," and she gave a little laugh.

"Come on, Joe." Jasper sprang up and shook Joel's arm. "We'll go and hunt for it."

"I'll go, too." Van and Percy screamed it together. Now that any trouble had come to Joel, each vied with the other to see which could work the faster to help matters.

"I laid it—right down. Oh, dear me!" Joel was pretty far gone in distress by this time, and blubbered miserably, as they all raced across the greensward, Polly and Alexia following swiftly. "Hold on there, James," ordered Jasper, to one of the three men busy dismantling the post office of its improvised trimmings of pine branches.

"Eh—eh, sor? Stop, boys," said James to the workmen within the arbor.

"We have lost something," panted Jasper, as the whole group precipitated themselves up to the spot.

"Is that so, sor?" said James, in great concern. "Well, if I'd 'a' known it, I'd 'a' kept a sharp eye out for it, sor." Polly and Alexia were already in the arbor in the thickest of the green branches scattered over the floor, and the boys were picking and pulling wildly, everywhere a banknote could be supposed to hide. "What was it, sor?"

"A banknote," said Jasper, down on his knees, prowling over the floor with both hands, while Joel, who could scarcely see for the tears that streamed down his chubby cheeks, searched desperately on all sides.

"Is that so, sor?" said James, in great distress. "Well now, that's too bad. We've taken off two loads already, sor."

"Where have you put them?" demanded Jasper, springing to his feet.

"Down in the dump, sor."

"We must look that over," said Jasper decidedly. "Send your men with lanterns; don't

touch a single thing here, James, I'll come back," and he sprang off.

"No, no, sor," said James, touching his cap. "Now, boys," to the workmen, "you can leave this here; get your lanterns and help the master."

"All right," said the men.

"Polly, you and Alexia keep on hunting, won't you?" called Jasper over his shoulder, as the boys flew off.

"Yes, we will," called back Polly, who would very much have preferred the pleasures of "the dump," a big dell in process of filling up with just such debris as had now been added.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Alexia discontentedly, "now we're mewed up here when we might be in that dear old sweet dump, Polly Pepper; and all because we're girls."

"Well, we can't help it," said Polly, with a sigh, who wished very much sometimes that she might be a boy, "so we'd much better keep at work hunting for that ten-dollar bill, Alexia."

"And Joel is so dreadfully careless," said Alexia, determined to grumble at something, and poking aimlessly at the green branches scattered on the floor. "I don't suppose we'll ever find it in all this world, in such a mess."

"We must," said Polly, a little white line coming around her mouth.

"Well, we can't, so what's the use of saying that?" and Alexia gave a restful stretch to her long arms. "Oh, me! oh, my! I'm so tired, Polly Pepper!"

"You know we *must* find that ten-dollar bill, Alexia," repeated Polly hoarsely, working busily away for dear life.

"Well, we can't; it's perfectly hopeless—so do keep still. Just look at all this." Alexia waved her arms at the green draperies. "I'm going to pull the rest down anyway, though; that 'll be fun," and she made a dash at it.

"No, no," said Polly, on her knees on the floor, "we must leave all that till Jasper comes back. Come, Alexia, help me look over these."

"Oh, bother!" cried Alexia, in great disdain, "I don't want to poke over those old things. You know yourself it's no earthly use; we'll never find it in all this world, Polly Pepper."

There was a queer little sound, and Alexia, whirling around, saw Polly Pepper in a little heap down in the middle of the green branches.

"Oh, misery! what have I done?"—rushing over to her and shaking her arms. "Oh, Polly,

do get up, we *will* find it, I'm positively sure; do get up, Polly." But Polly didn't stir.

"Oh, dear me!" wailed Alexia. "Polly, *please* get up." She ran all around her, wringing her hands. "Oh, what did I say it for! Polly, Polly Pepper, we'll find it, as sure as anything. We can't help but find it. Polly, do get up."

She flung herself down on her knees and began to pat the white face. Polly opened her eyes and looked at her.

"What did you say such dreadful things for, Alexia?" she said reproachfully.

"Oh, I couldn't help it," exclaimed Alexia remorsefully. "There! Oh, dear me! you've scared me 'most to death, Polly Pepper. Do get up." So Polly sat straight, and Alexia fussed over her, all the while repeating, "We will find it, Polly."

"Dear me!" said Polly, "this isn't hunting for that ten-dollar bill."

"Well, what's the use?" began Alexia. "Oh, yes, of course we'll find it," she brought herself up quickly. "Now, Polly, I tell you." She sprang to her feet. "Let's clear a place in this corner"—and she rushed over to it—"and then

pick up every branch and shake it, and put it over here. Then we'll know surely whether that horrid thing is on the floor or not."

"So we shall," cried Polly, getting up on her feet; "that's fine, Alexia!" And they set to work so busily they didn't hear when the boys came back from their search. But the first moment she saw Jasper's face, Polly knew that the hunt was unsuccessful, and the next minute Joel threw himself into her arms and hugged her closely.

"Oh, Polly," he sobbed, "it's gone, and it's my fault."

"Cheer up, old fellow," said Jasper, clapping him on the back; "we'll find it yet."

Van and Percy stood dismally by, knocking their heels against the arbor side, and feeling quite sure they should burst out crying in another minute, if Joel didn't stop.

Polly patted his poor head and cuddled it in her neck. "Oh, Joey, we'll find it," she said, swallowing a big lump in her throat; "don't cry, dear," while Alexia sniffed and wrung her hands, fiercely turning her back on them all.

"Now, boys," said Jasper, in his cheeriest fashion, "we'll all set to work on these vines

that are left. Come on, now, and let's see who will work the fastest."

"I will," announced Van, rushing over to twitch down the green drapery that had been such a piece of work for the gardeners to put up. Percy said nothing, but set to work quietly, lifting each branch to peer under it.

"Take care," warned Jasper, pausing a minute in his own work to look over at Van's reckless fingers; "you must shake each one as you pull it down, before you throw it out on the grass, else we'll have all our work to do over again. Oh, Alexia, are you coming to help?"

"Of course I am," declared Alexia. "Oh, Van, what a piece of work you are making!"

Polly was whispering to Joel, "We ought to help," when Van gave a shout, "I've found it! I've found it!"

"Hurrah!" Jasper leapt down from the railing and plunged up in great excitement to Polly and Joel. "There, old fellow, what did I tell you?" he cried with glowing face, and clapping Joel on the back again.

"Phoh!" exclaimed Percy, in great contempt, "he hasn't, either; it's only a bit of green paper."

"I thought I had," said Van, quite crest

fallen, and flinging down the dingy bit; "it looked just like it."

It was too much; and Joel, who had hopped out of Polly's lap, flung himself on the floor and cried as if his heart would break. They couldn't get him out of it, so Jasper just picked him up and marched off to the house with him to give him to Mother Fisher.

And the next morning, search as hard as they could—and everybody was hunting by that time —not a trace of the ten-dollar bill could be discovered. And Mrs. Chatterton took pains to waylay Joel in the hall or on the stairs at all possible opportunities, and ask him, with a smile at his swollen nose and eyes (for he had cried so he could hardly see), if he had found it yet. But these chances became very few, for it was Jasper's and Polly's very especial business to keep guard over Joel, and try to divert him in every way. Meantime the hunt went on. And the third day, when it became perfectly apparent to the entire household that the banknote was in such a clever hiding-place that no one could find it, Joel, his tears all gone, marched into Mr. King's writing-room and up to his big table, and without a bit of warning burst out:

"I want to sell tin!"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed the old gentleman, looking over his glasses. "What is that you are saying, Joey, my boy?"

"I want to sell tin," said Joel bluntly.

"*Want to sell tin!*" ejaculated old Mr. King, in amazement.

"Yes, sir, just like Mr. Biggs; he got lots of money. May I, Grandpapa? Please say I may." Joel ran around the writing-table to plant himself by the old gentleman's chair.

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Mr. King, leaning back in dismay, "whatever can you mean, my boy?"

"Grandpapa"—Joel laid a brown hand on the velvet morning-jacket, and brought his black eyes very close to the gentleman's face—"I've got to earn that ten dollars; I've got to, Grandpapa, 'cause I lost it." Joel's voice broke here, but he recovered it and dashed on, "And I can't do it unless you will let me sell tin. *Please*, Grandpapa dear. Mr. Biggs used to, in Badgertown, you know, and he took me with him sometimes on his cart, so I know how; and I can sell a lot. I can wheel it in my express wagon, and——" Joel by this time was running on so

glibly, under the impression that if he didn't stop, Mr. King would be induced to say yes, that the old gentleman was forced to put up his hand peremptorily.

"There, there, Joey, my boy," he said, settling his glasses that had slipped to the end of his nose, and taking Joel's hand. "Now, then, let's hear all about the matter."

And in a minute or two Joel was perched on the old gentleman's knee, and they were having the most sociable time possible. And before long Joel forgot he hadn't laughed for oh, such a long while, and lo and behold! Grandpapa said something so very funny that they both burst out into a merry peal, that rang out into the wide hall beyond.

"Joel is actually laughing," exclaimed Polly, coming soberly down the stairs; and she was so overcome by the joyful sound that she sat right down on the step. "Oh, dear me, how perfectly lovely!" she breathed, folding her hands in delight.

"Isn't it!" Jasper slipped into a seat on the step by her side. "Now everything is going to be fine when Joe can laugh!"

"Just hear him," cried Polly, pricking up her

ears to catch the blissful sound, "and Grandpapa, too. Oh, Jasper!"

"I know it," said Jasper, in great satisfaction. "Father has been so pulled down because Joe took it so hard."

"Well, you see, Joel couldn't help it," cried Polly, "because it was careless, just as Mamsie said, to leave anything without handing it to the person."

"Of course," assented Jasper quickly. "Mrs. Fisher is right; but I'm sure any one is likely to do it, and Joel was in such a hurry that day, everybody pulling at him this way and that to get letters."

"I know it," said Polly, delighted to hear Joel's part taken, "and just think how he worked before, Jasper. He helped such a perfect lot getting the flower-table ready."

"He helped everywhere," declared Jasper, bringing down his hand with emphasis on his knee. "I never saw anybody work as Joe did."

"And now to think that he has lost that money!" mourned Polly, her head drooping sorrowfully over her closed hands. "Oh, dear me, Jasper!"

"But just hear him laugh," cried Jasper,

springing up; "it's going to be all right now, Polly, I do believe. Come, let's go and hunt some more for the banknote."

So they both flew off from the stairs to begin the search for the money again. For no one stopped—dear me, not a bit of it!—the hunt for the hidden ten-dollar bill. Everybody but Phronsie and little Dick searched and prowled in every nook and corner where there was the least possible chance that the ten-dollar bill could be in hiding. They had both been so sleepy on the evening of the garden party when the loss had been announced, that it fell unheeded on their ears. And afterward all the household was careful to keep the bad news from them. So the two children went on in blissful unconsciousness of Joel's trouble, while the grand hunt proceeded all around them.

When Joel emerged from Grandpapa King's writing-room, he was hanging to the old gentleman's hand and looking up into his face and chattering away.

"You know it means work," said old Mr. King, looking down at him.

"I know, Grandpapa," said Joel, bobbing his stubby, black head.

"And you must keep at it," said the old gentleman decidedly, "else no pay. There's to be no dropping the job, once you take it up. If you do, you'll get no money. That's the bargain, Joe?"—with a keen glance into the chubby face.

"Oh, I will, Grandpapa, I will," declared Joel eagerly, and hopping up and down; "I'll do every single speck of the work. Now do let us hurry and get the book."

"Yes, we'll hurry, seeing our business arrangement is all settled," laughed the old gentleman. "Now, then, Joel, my boy, we'll go down-town and buy the blank book, so that I can set you to work at once," and he grasped the brown hand tightly, and away they went.

And in ten minutes everybody knew that Joel was going to make a list of all the books in a certain case in old Mr. King's writing-room, and that Grandpapa and he were already off down-town to buy a new blank book for the work. And at the end of it—oh, joy!—Joel was to have a crisp ten-dollar bill to replace the one he had lost.

XI RACHEL

"HERE she comes!" roared Mr. Tisbett. The townspeople, hurrying to Badgertown depot to see the train bearing the new little girl sent on by Mrs. Fisher to their parson's care, crowded up, Mr. and Mrs. Henderson smilingly in the center of the biggest group.

"Oh, husband, I do pity her so!" breathed the parson's wife. "Poor thing, she will be so shy and distressed!" The parson's heart gave a responsive thrill, as he craned his neck to peer here and there for their new charge. "She hasn't come. Oh, dear me!"—as a voice broke in at his elbow.

"I'm here." The words weren't much, to be sure, but the tone was wholly self-possessed, and when the parson whirled around, and Mrs. Henderson, who had been looking the other way, brought her gaze back, they saw a little girl in a dark brown suit, a brown hat under which fell smooth braids of black hair, who was regarding

them with a pair of the keenest eyes they had either of them ever seen.

"Oh—oh—my child—" stammered Mr. Henderson, putting out a kind hand. "So you have come, Rachel?"

"Yes, I am Rachel," said the child, looking up into his face and laying her hand in the parson's big one; then she turned her full regard upon the minister's wife.

Mrs. Henderson was divided in her mind, for an instant, whether to kiss this self-possessed child, as she had fully arranged in her mind beforehand to do, or to let such a ceremony go by. But in a breathing space she had her arms about her, and was drawing her to her breast.

"Rachel, dear, I am so glad you have come to us."

Rachel glanced up sharply, heaved a big sigh, and when she lifted her head from Mrs. Henderson's neck, there was something bright that glistened in either eye; she brushed it off before any one could spy it, as the parson was saying:

"And now, where is your bag, child—er—Rachel, I mean?"

Rachel pointed to the end of the platform. "I'll go an' tell 'em to bring it here."

"No, no, child." The parson started briskly.

"Let us all go," said Mrs. Henderson kindly, gathering Rachel's hand up in one of hers. "Come, dear." So off they hurried, the platform's length, the farmers and their wives looking after them with the greatest interest.

"My, but ain't Mrs. Henderson glad to get a girl, though!"

"Yes, she sets by her a'ready."

"Sakes alive! I thought she was a poor child," exclaimed one woman, who was dreadfully disappointed to lose the anticipated object of charity.

"So she is," cried another—"as poor as Job's turkey, but Mr. King has dressed her up, you know, an' he's goin' to edicate her, too."

"Well, she'll pay for it, I reckon. My! she looks smart, even the back of her!"

And before very long, Rachel had been inducted into her room, a pretty little one under the eaves, neat as a pin in blue-and-white chintz covering, around which she had given a swift glance of approval. And now she was down in the parsonage kitchen, in a calico gown and checked apron; her own new brown ribbons having been taken off from her braids, rolled up

carefully, and laid in the top drawer, the common, every-day ones taking their places.

Peletiah and Ezekiel were each in a corner of the kitchen, with their pale blue eyes riveted on her.

"Well, dear," Mrs. Henderson greeted her kindly, "you have changed your gown very quickly."

A tall, square-shouldered woman stalked in from the little entry.

"Oh, Jerusha," exclaimed Mrs. Henderson pleasantly, "this is the little girl that Mrs. Fisher sent us. Rachel, go up and speak to Miss Jerusha."

Rachel went over obediently and put out her hand, which the parson's sister didn't seem to see. Instead, she drew herself up stiffer than ever, and stared at the child.

"Ah, well, I hope she won't forget that she's very poor, and that you've taken her out of pity," said Miss Jerusha.

Rachel started back as if shot, and her black eyes flashed. "I ain't poor," she screamed. "I ain't goin' to be pitied."

"Yes, you are, too," declared Miss Jerusha, quite pleased at the effect of her words, and tell-

ing off each syllable by bringing one set of bony fingers down on the other emphatically; "in fact, you're a beggar, and my brother——"

"I ain't, ain't, ain't!" screamed Rachel shrilly, and, flinging herself on her face on the floor, she flapped her feet up and down and writhed in distress. "I want to go home!" she sobbed.

The boys, for once in their lives, actually started, and presently they were across the kitchen, to their mother, kneeling by Rachel's side.

"Don't let her go," they said together.

"She isn't going," said Mrs. Henderson, smoothing the shaking shoulders, but Rachel screamed on.

"Dear me!" The parson hurried in at the uproar, his glasses set up on his forehead where his nervous fingers had pushed them. "What is the matter?"

"That poor child," answered Miss Jerusha, pointing a long finger over at the group in the middle of the kitchen, "is acting like Satan. I guess you'll repent, brother, ever bringing her here."

"'Twas Aunt Jerusha," declared Peletiah bluntly, "and I wish she'd go home."

"Hush, hush, dear," said his mother, looking up into his face.

There was an awful pause, the parson drew a long breath, then he turned to his sister.

"Jerusha," he said, "I wish you would go into the sitting-room, if you please."

"An' let you pet that beggar child," she exclaimed, in shrill scorn, but she stalked off.

Mr. Henderson went swiftly across the kitchen and knelt down by his wife.

"Rachel"—he put his hand on the little girl's head—"get directly up, my child!"

Rachel lifted her eyes, and peered about. "Has she gone—that dreadful, bad, old woman?"

"There is no one here but those who love you," said the minister. "Now, child, get directly up and sit in that chair." He indicated the one, and in a minute Rachel was perched on it, with streaming eyes. Peletiah, having started to get a towel, and in his trepidation presenting the dish-rag, the parson dried her tears on his own handkerchief.

"Now, then, that is better," he said, in satisfaction, as they all grouped around her chair. "Rachel, there mustn't be anything of this sort

—tears, I mean—again. That lady is my sister, and——"

"*Your sister!*" screamed Rachel, precipitating herself forward on her chair in imminent danger of falling on her nose, to gaze at him in amazement.

"Yes"—a dull red flush crept over the minister's face—"and—and whatever she says, Rachel, why, you are not to mind, child."

"She ain't a-goin' to sass me," declared Rachel stoutly.

"Well, I don't believe she will again; let us hope not," said Mr. Henderson, in a worried way. "However, you are not to cry; remember that, Rachel, whatever happens," he added firmly: "you are to be happy here; this is your home, and we all love you."

"You do?" said Rachel, much amazed, looking at them all. "Oh, well, then, I'll stay." And slipping down from her chair, she seized Mrs. Henderson's apron. "What 'll I do? Mrs. Fisher told me how to wash dishes. May I do 'em?"

"Yes, and the boys shall wipe them," said Mrs. Henderson, and pretty soon there was a gay little bustle in the old kitchen, the parson

staying away from the writing of the sermon to see it.

But Peletiah and Ezekiel were much too slow to suit Rachel, who got far ahead of them, so she flew to the drawer in the big table where she had seen them get the dish-towels, and, helping herself, she fell to work drying some of the big pile in the drainer in the sink.

"I don't see how you can go so fast," observed Peletiah, laboriously polishing up his plate.

"Well, I don't see how you can go so slow," retorted Rachel, with deft passes of the towel over the cup. "My! I sh'd think your elbows had gone to sleep."

"They haven't gone to sleep," said Peletiah, who was always literal; and setting down his plate, half-dried, on the table, he turned over one arm to investigate.

"Of course not, you little ninny," said Rachel lightly. "I didn't——"

"Rachel, Rachel!" said the parson's wife, over by the table. She was getting her material together for baking pies, and she now added gently, "We don't call each other names, you must remember that, child."

"Oh!" said Rachel. She stopped her busy

towel a minute to think, then it flapped harder and faster, to make up for lost time.

"Well, go ahead," she said to Peletiah, "and wipe your plate."

So Peletiah, letting his elbows take care of themselves, picked up his plate and set to work on its surface again; and pretty soon the dishes were all declared done, the pan and mop washed out, and hung up.

"What 'll I do next?" Rachel smoothed down her apron and stood before the baking-table, a boy on either side.

"Now, boys," said Mrs. Henderson, pausing in her work of rolling out the pie crust, "I think you had better take Rachel down to see Grandma Bascom. I've told her she's coming to-day, and she's quite impatient to see her. And, Rachel, you can tell her about Mrs. Fisher and Polly and the boys. And oh, Rachel, be sure to tell her about Phronsie; she does just love that child so!"

The parson's wife leaned on the rolling-pin, and a bright color came into her face.

"I'll tell her," said Rachel, a soft gleam in her eyes, and smoothing her apron.

"And, Peletiah, go into the buttery, and get

that little pat of butter done up in a cloth, and give it to Grandma. I do wish my pies were baked"—and she fell to work again—"so I could send her one."

So Peletiah went into the buttery and got the pat of butter, and the three started off. The parson stepped away from the doorway into the entry, where he had been silently watching proceedings, and went over to the window.

"Come here, Almira." He held out his hand.

She dropped her rolling-pin and ran over to his side. He drew her to him.

"See, dear," he said.

Rachel and the two boys were proceeding over the greensward leading down the road. She had one on either side; and, wonder of wonders, they were all hand in hand.

"We're going to see your Gran," said Rachel, a very sober expression settling over her thin little face.

"What?" said Peletiah.

"Your Gran; that's what your mother said."

"Oh, no, she didn't," contradicted Peletiah; "we are going to Grandma Bascom's."

"Well, that's the same thing," said Rachel; "she's your Gran, isn't she?"

"She's Grandma Bascom," repeated Peletiah stolidly.

"Oh, dear me! of course! But she's *your* Gran, isn't she?"—her tongue fairly aching to call him "ninny" again.

"No, she isn't; she isn't any one's Gran—she's just Grandma Bascom."

"Oh!" said Rachel. Perhaps it wasn't so very bad as she feared. She would wait and see.

"She's dreadfully deaf," remarked Peletiah.

"What's that?"

"She can't hear unless you scream."

Rachel burst into a loud laugh, but it was very musical; and before they knew it, although they were very much astonished, the two boys were laughing, too, though they hadn't the least idea at what.

"I'm glad of it," announced Rachel, when she had gotten through. "I love to scream. Sometimes it seems as if I'd die if I couldn't. Don't you?"

"No, I don't," said Peletiah, "ever feel so."

"Don't *you?*" Rachel leaned over to peer into Ezekiel's face.

"No, I don't, either," he said.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Rachel, catching her breath. "Well, let's run." And before either boy knew what was going to happen, she was hauling them along at such a mad pace as they had never before in all their lives indulged in.

The butter-pat slipped out of Peletiah's hand, gone on the wind, and landed on the roadside grass.

"Wasn't that a good one!" cried Rachel, her eyes shining, as she brought up suddenly. "Oh, my! ain't things sweet, though!"—wrinkling up her nose in delight.

"I lost the butter-pat," observed Peletiah, when he could get his breath.

"I never see anything so beautiful," Rachel was saying, over and over. Then she flung herself flat on the grass, and buried her nose in it, smelling it hungrily. "Oh, my!"

"I lost the butter-pat," observed Peletiah again, and standing over her.

"And I'm a-goin' to live here," declared Rachel, in a transport, and wriggling in the sweet clover, "if I'm good. I'm goin' to be good all the time. Yes, sir!"

"I lost the butter-pat," repeated Peletiah.

"Butter-pat?" Rachel caught the last words and sprang to her feet.

"Oh, yes, I forgot; we must hurry with the butter-pat. Come on!" and she whirled around on Peletiah. "Why, where——?" as she saw his empty hands.

"I lost the butter-pat," said Peletiah. "I've been telling you so."

"No, you haven't," contradicted Rachel flatly.

"Yes, I have," said Peletiah stolidly.

"No such thing." Rachel squared up to him, her black eyes flashing. "You haven't said a single word, you bad, wicked boy."

"Yes, I have," repeated Peletiah, ready to say it over for all time; "I've told you so a great many times."

Rachel looked at him, and put up both hands. The only thing proper to do under such circumstances was to shake him smartly, but it seemed so like attacking a granite post, and besides, he was the minister's son, and she was going to be good, else they must send her away (so Mrs. Fisher had said), so her arms flopped down to her side, and hung there dismally. And she burst out:

"Where did you lose it, you nin—? I mean

—oh, dear me!—where, I say?"—frowning impatiently.

"Back there," said Peletiah, pointing down the road. "You pulled me along so, it flew out of my hand."

Rachel set her teeth together hard.

"Come on!"

She seized a hand of each boy, Ezekiel being a silent spectator all the time; and if they went fast before, this time, in retracing their steps, it might be called flying, till a little spot on the roadside grass showed the object of their search. Peletiah's breath was gone entirely by this time, and he sank down by its side without a word, his brother following suit.

"I shall carry it now," announced Rachel, gathering up the little pat, safe in its white cloth. "My! 'tain't hurt a bit." She brushed off a few marauding ants. "Come on, now!"

Peletiah struggled to his feet and gasped, "I shall carry it," and put out his hands.

"No such thing." Rachel held the butter-pat firmly in her slender, brown hand. "My! you ain't fit to carry no butter-pats—let 'em drop out of your hands. Come on!"

"I shall carry it," declared Peletiah doggedly,

and bringing his pale eyes to bear on her face, while he stood still in his tracks.

"I hope you may get it," cried Rachel triumphantly. "I never see such a boy. Come on, I say." She held out her hand with authority.

"My mother said I was to carry the butter-pat, and I shall carry it," said Peletiah, putting out one hand for it, and the other behind his back.

Rachel wrinkled her brows and thought a minute.

"So she did," she said. Then she set the butter-pat in Peletiah's hand, and pinched his thumb down over it. "There, hold on to it," she said, "or you'll lose it again. Now, come on!"

The way back was conducted on slower lines, as Rachel had an anxious oversight lest the butter-pat should again be taken off on the wind, so that Peletiah and Ezekiel had a chance to recover their breath, with some degree of composure, by the time they turned down the lane to Grandma Bascom's. There she was, sitting in her big chintz-covered chair, resting after the morning's work, as they found on entering the little old kitchen.

Rachel's eyes had been getting bigger and bigger, though she had said nothing up to this time; but when they rested on the old lady's face, under the big, frilled cap, she burst out sharply:

"Is that your Gran?"

"She isn't my Gran," replied Peletiah.

"No, she isn't," echoed Ezekiel.

"Well, is she Gran?" demanded Rachel impatiently—"anybody's Gran—just Gran? Say, is she?"

"No, she isn't Gran," said Peletiah, shaking his head of stiff, light hair.

"Oh, dear me! you said so," cried Rachel, in a high, disappointed key. "Oh, dear, dear, dear! I wish she was." And, terribly afraid she was going to cry, she marched off to the little-paned window, and twisted her fingers into knots.

"She's Grandma," said Ezekiel, walking over to her and peering around her side.

"Oh, then she is," cried Rachel, springing around. "Say"—she seized his jacket—"she's my Gran, an'——"

"Grandma, I said," repeated Ezekiel.

"Yes, yes, Grandma; well, she's mine."

"She's all our Grandma," said Ezekiel decidedly.

"Yes, yes, but she's mine, too," declared Rachel, bobbing her head decidedly. "She shall be my Gran—Grandma. I shall just take her, so there!"

"You musn't take her away," said Ezekiel, in alarm.

"I ain't goin' to; I don't want to. I'm goin' to live here always an' forever," declared Rachel firmly.

Ezekiel smiled at that in great satisfaction, and the matter being settled, Rachel skipped over to the old lady's chair, and looked steadily down into the wrinkled face.

"Go out and put the butter-pat somewhere," she said to Peletiah, who still held it in his hand, waiting to present it.

"I must give it to Grandma," he said; "my mother told me to."

"Well, you can't while she's asleep," said Rachel quickly, "so you put it somewhere—anywhere—and when she wakes up, why, you can give it to her. Do hurry—and you go and help him."

So the two boys walked off to find a place in the buttery, and quick as lightning Rachel leaned over and set a kiss on the wrinkled old cheek.

If Grandma couldn't hear, she was very quick at feeling.

"Why!" She stirred uneasily in her chair, and opened her eyes.

"Who is this?" she asked, staring at the strange little girl, for although the parson's wife had told her all about the new member of the family to come that day, Grandma was so bewildered by being suddenly aroused from her sleep, she had forgotten all about it. "Hey, who is it?"

Peletiah, not having had time to put down the butter-pat, now came up and presented it with all due formality.

"But who is this little gal?" asked Grandma, as he set the butter-pat in the middle of the checked apron over her lap.

"She's Rachel," said Peletiah.

"Eh? What?" Grandma held a shaking hand behind her ear. "Speak a little louder, Peletiah; you know I'm a-growin' hard o' hearin', just a grain."

"Rachel," shouted Peletiah, as he stood still in his tracks in front of her.

"Ain't well! Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Grandma, in a tone of great concern. "What a

pity!" and she turned and regarded the stranger with anxiety.

"Oh, dear me! You get away, Peletiah," commanded Rachel, brushing him aside. So Peletiah, very glad to be released, moved off, and Rachel, putting her mouth to the nodding cap-border, said very distinctly:

"Mrs. Fisher sent me to live at the minister's; I'm Rachel."

"Oh, my land o' Goshen!" exclaimed Grandma Bascom, lifting both hands in delight. "Why, I can hear you splendid. You see, I'm only a grain deaf. An' so you're that little gal. Well, I'm glad you've come, you pretty creeter, you!"

XII DOINGS AT THE PARSONAGE

AND in another minute Rachel was telling all about Mrs. Fisher and Polly and Phronsie—oh, and Joel and David—for Grandma kept interrupting and asking all sorts of questions, so that the news and messages were all tangled up together.

"Did Joel say he wanted pep'mints?" asked Grandma, in a lull.

"Oh, yes, he said yours were awful good, and he wished he had some of 'em," Rachel answered. She didn't dare take her mouth away from the cap-frill, and her feet ached dreadfully from standing still so long. But Grandma was as bright as a button, and hungry for every scrap of information.

"Land o' Goshen!" mourned Grandma, "how I wish he was comin' in now! an' I'd give him plenty." She sat still for a minute, lost in thought. Peletiah and Ezekiel had wandered off outside, where they sat under the lilac bushes, to

rest after their unwonted exercise, so the hens, undisturbed, stepped over the sill of the kitchen door, and scratched and picked about to their hearts' content.

"I'll drive 'em out," said Rachel, delighted at the chance of action this would give her, and springing off.

"Take the broom," screamed Grandma after her, "and then hurry and come back and tell me some more."

So Rachel, wishing the duty could be an hour long, shooed and waved her broom wildly, and ran and raced, and the fat old hens tumbled over each other to get away. And then she came slowly back to Grandma's side, to go over again every bit she had told before. Until, looking up at the old clock on the shelf, she saw that it was one minute of twelve o'clock.

"Oh, my! I've got to go," she screamed in Grandma's ear, and without another word she dashed off and up to the lilac bushes. "Boys, come this minute." She held out both hands. "It's awful late."

"I know it," said Peletiah, with a very grieved face; "we've been waiting for you ever so long, and dinner's ready at home."

"Well, come now." She stuck her long arms out straight, and shook her fingers impatiently. "Oh, dear me—do hurry!"

"I ain't goin' to take hold of hands," declared Peletiah, edging off.

"Nor I, either," echoed Ezekiel.

"Oh, yes, you must." And without waiting for more words on the matter, Rachel seized a hand of each, and bore off the boys.

If they ran before, they flew now. But all the same they were late to dinner, and the parson and his wife and Miss Jerusha were all helped around, and had begun to eat.

"There, see what that new girl has done already," said Miss Jerusha sternly, laying down her knife and fork. "Peletiah and Ezekiel ain't ever late. Well, you'll see trouble enough with her, or I'll miss my guess."

Peletiah sank down on the upper step of the piazza, but Ezekiel crept into the kitchen, while Rachel pushed boldly up to Mrs. Henderson's chair.

"Oh, I'm awful sorry," she said. Her face was very flushed and her eyes glowed with the run.

"Ben gallivantin' off an' temptin' the boys to

play," declared Miss Jerusha, with a shrewd nod of her brown front. "Oh, I know."

"We won't say any more about it now, dear," said Mrs. Henderson gently, at sight of the hot little face. "There, get into your chair, this one next to me. Where's Peletiah?"—looking about.

"Oh, I'm awful tired," wailed Ezekiel, slipping into his seat next to the parson, and he drew the back of his hand across his red face.

"Ben playing so hard," said Miss Jerusha disagreeably, "an' now you're all het up."

"I haven't played a single bit," declared Ezekiel stoutly, and with a very injured expression of countenance. "Oh, dear me, I *am* so tired!" stretching his legs under the table.

"Eat your dinner, my son," said the parson, putting a liberal portion on his plate.

"Oh, dear me!" Ezekiel essayed to, but laid down his spoon. "I don't want anything, I'm so tired."

Mrs. Henderson cast an anxious glance over at him.

"No need to worry," her husband telegraphed back, going quietly on with his own dinner. Rachel had begun on hers with hungry zest, but

stopped suddenly, hopped out of her chair, and raced to the door.

"Rachel!" It wasn't a loud voice, but she found herself back again and looking into Mrs. Henderson's face.

"Sit down, dear; we do not leave the table in that way."

So Rachel slipped into her seat, feeling as if all the blood in her body were in her hot cheeks.

"Now, what is it?" The parson's wife took one of the brown hands working nervously under the tablecloth. "Tell me; don't be afraid," she said softly. But Miss Jerusha heard.

"Stuff and nonsense!" she exclaimed, with a sneer. "When I was a child, there was no such coddlin' goin' on, I can tell you."

"It's Peletiah," said Rachel. "Oh, dear me! he's out on the piazza, and he must be awfully hungry. Can't I make him come in?"

"No, sit still. Husband"—the parson's wife looked down the table—"excuse me a minute." She slipped out, and in another moment in she came, and Peletiah with her.

And then Mr. Henderson told such a funny story about a monkey he had read about only just that very morning, that Ezekiel forgot there

ever was such a thing as tired legs, and even Peletiah had no thoughts for that dreadful run home from Grandma Bascom's.

As for Rachel, all idea of dinner flew at once out of her head. She laid down her knife and fork and leaned forward with sparkling eyes, to catch every word. Seeing which, Mrs. Henderson burst out laughing.

"I'm afraid you are making things worse, husband," she said, "for they won't eat any dinner at all now."

"I surely am," said the parson, with another laugh, "and I thought I was going to help so much," he added ruefully.

"How you can laugh," exclaimed Miss Jerusha sourly, at the good time in progress, and sitting quite stiffly, "I don't for my part see."

"Oh, well, if you'd laugh more, it would be better for all of us, Jerusha," said her brother good-naturedly.

"I ain't a-goin' to laugh," declared Miss Jerusha, "and it's a wicked, sinful shame to set such an example before those boys, like coddlin' up that girl for keepin' them off playin'. I never see such goin's on!"

"We haven't been playing," said Peletiah stoutly.

"I told her so," said Ezekiel fretfully, seeing that his father had no more monkey stories to offer, "but she keeps saying it just the same. I wish she'd go off and play," he added vindictively.

The idea of Miss Jerusha ever having played, made Rachel turn in her chair and regard her fixedly. Then she broke out into a laugh; it was such a merry peal that presently the boys joined in, and even the parson and his wife had hard work to keep their faces straight.

"Well, if I *ever* see such goin's on!" Miss Jerusha shoved back her chair and stalked out of the room.

"Did she ever play?" asked Rachel, when the door into the keeping-room had slammed.

"Why, yes, of course, child," said Mrs. Henderson, with a smile, "when she was a little girl."

"And was she ever a little girl?" persisted Rachel.

"Why, certainly. Now eat your dinner, Rachel."

Rachel picked up her knife and fork. When

the two boys saw that she was ready to really begin on her meal, they set to on theirs.

"I'm awful hungry," announced Peletiah, when he had been working busily on his plateful.

The parson burst out into a laugh, like a boy.

"Hush, husband," warned Mrs. Henderson; "I'm afraid Jerusha will hear."

"I can't help it, Almira." His eyes were brimming with amusement. "Our boys are getting waked up already."

"I ain't asleep," declared Peletiah, looking up at his father in amazement; "I'm eating my dinner."

"So am I," announced Ezekiel wisely, and putting out his plate for another potato.

"So I see," said his father gravely. "Well, now we're all getting on very well," he added, in great satisfaction, with a glance around the table. "Good-bye; you must excuse me, wife; you know I must get over to the funeral early."

"Is old Miss Bedlow dead, Ma?" asked Peletiah, pausing in the act of getting some gravy to his mouth.

"Yes, dear. Take care, Peletiah, and pay attention to your dinner."

Peletiah set down the mouthful on his plate. "I hain't got to go, have I, Ma?" he asked, in trepidation.

"No, dear; now go on with your dinner, and don't say 'hain't.'"

"I'm glad I haven't got to go," observed Peletiah, with a long sigh of relief, and beginning on his dinner once more. "I don't like funerals."

"I do." Rachel bobbed her black head at him across the table, and her eyes roved excitedly. "I've seen lots an' lots of 'em in the city. They're fine, I tell you." She laid down her knife and fork again and waved her arms. "Oh, a string of carriages as long—an' the corpse is sometimes in a white box, and heaps of flowers. I like 'em next to the circus."

"There, there, Rachel, eat your dinner, child," broke in Mrs. Henderson quickly. "And, boys, don't talk any more. You must get through dinner, for I have to go to Miss Bedlow's by two o'clock," and she got out of her chair and began to clear the table.

So all that was to be heard now in the parsonage kitchen was the pleasant rattle of knives and forks, and the bustle of clearing up, and

presently the children hopped out of their chairs and began to help Mrs. Henderson to set everything in order.

"I'm goin' to wash every single thing up," announced Rachel, hurrying for the mop.

"Can you, dear?" asked the parson's wife. She was very tired, and yet had the funeral of the old parishioner to attend. But the risk seemed great of allowing the new little girl to do up all the dinner dishes. "There are a great many of them, and some of them are big"—glancing doubtfully around the piles. "Are you sure you can manage them?"

"Why, yes," declared Rachel in scorn. "I can do 'em all just as easy!" She stopped to snap her fingers at the greasy plate then ran over to get the big teakettle on the stove in a twinkling.

"Let Peletiah carry that for you," said Mrs. Henderson.

"He's so slow," said Rachel, but she stopped obediently.

"Rachel, there is one thing"—and the parson's wife came over and put her hand on the thin little shoulder—"we all help each other in this house, and we never talk against one."

"Oh," said Rachel.

Peletiah by this time had advanced on the teakettle, and, as soon as he could, he bore it off and solemnly poured a goodly supply of boiling-hot water into the waiting dishpan.

"Now you boys are to wipe the dishes for Rachel," said their mother, with an approving glance at the group.

"I'd rather," began Rachel, wrinkling up her face.

"So remember; and when you are through, and the kitchen is set up neatly, you may all play out of doors this afternoon, for lessons don't begin for you until to-morrow, Rachel. And now be good children."

"I don like lessons," said Peletiah, when they were left alone.

"Don't you?" exclaimed Rachel, in astonishment, and resting her soapy hands on the edge of the dishpan.

"No, I don't," declared Peletiah, with great deliberation, "like them at all."

"Well, I shall, I know." Rachel twitched off her hands and slapped the mop down smartly among the cups in the hot water.

"Ow! you splashed me all over," exclaimed

Ezekiel. "See there, now, Rachel." He stepped back and held up his arm.

"Phoo! that's nothing," said Rachel.

"It hurt; it's hot," said Ezekiel, squirming about.

"Well, if you ain't a baby!" cried Rachel scornfully.

"My mother said we weren't to call names," observed Peletiah.

"Oh, my! I forgot that. But he is a baby," declared Rachel.

"My mother said we were not to call names," repeated Peletiah, exactly as if he hadn't made that remark before.

"Oh, dear me! how perfectly awful you—I mean I never saw such boys. Oh, my!"

"My mother said——"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted Rachel, splashing away for dear life; "well, now we must hurry and get these dishes done."

"And then we can go out and play," said Ezekiel, departing with the plate he was drying to a safe distance from the hot shower from Rachel's busy fingers.

"Yes. Oh, my, what fun! Let's hurry." And before the boys quite knew how, the dishes

were all piled in the pantry, the dishpan and mop washed out and hung up to dry, and the crumbs swept from the kitchen floor.

"There," said Rachel, smoothing down her apron in great satisfaction, "now we can go out. Come on, I'm going to the corner to see that funeral go by."

"We can't," said Peletiah, trying his best to hurry after her. "Mother doesn't let us go out of the yard when she's away; and beside, there isn't any corner—the road just goes round."

"Oh, bother!" Rachel whirled around and stamped her foot impatiently.

"And 'twill come past our house," contributed Ezekiel, gaining her side, "so let's sit on the doorstep till it comes."

"And you can tell us about the funerals you've seen in the city," suggested Peletiah, who had been thinking about them ever since.

"All right," said Rachel, seeing she was not to lose sight of the parade she so dearly loved. "Whoopity—la!" She flung herself down on the long, flat doorstone, and whipped her gown neatly away on either side. "I'm goin' to sit in the middle."

The boys, very much pleased at this arrange-

ment, which they would never have thought of suggesting, sat down sedately in their places and folded their hands in their laps.

"Now tell about those funerals," said Peletiah.

"Well, let me think," said Rachel, reflecting; "you see, I've seen so many. Hmm! Oh, I know!" She jumped so suddenly that she came near precipitating Ezekiel, who was leaning forward to attain a better view of her face, off into the middle of the peony bed.

"Take care!" Rachel twitched him back into his place. "Yes, I'm goin' to tell you about one perfectly splendid funeral I see just——"

"You mustn't say 'see,'" corrected Peletiah, with disapproval. He was fairly longing for the recital, but it would never do to let such a slip in conversation pass.

"Well, what shall I say, then?" cried Rachel pertly, and not at all pleased at the interruption.

"You must say 'saw.'"

"I didn't saw it; you can't saw a thing," she declared contemptuously. "You've got to see it, or else you can't say you did. So there, Pel—Pel—whatever your name is."

"My name is Peletiah," he said solemnly.

"Peletiah—oh, dear me!" Rachel put her face between her two hands and began to giggle.

"Tell about the funeral," said Ezekiel, twitching her sleeve.

"And you must say 'saw,'" reiterated Peletiah.

"I can't; 'tain't right, an' I ain't a-goin' to say 'saw' to please you, so there, now!" declared Rachel, bringing up her head and setting her mouth obstinately.

"Then I ain't going to sit here," said Peletiah, getting off from the door-stone, "because my mother wouldn't like it; she always makes me say 'saw.'"

"Does she?" cried Rachel, a little red spot coming on either cheek. "Does she, Pele——Pele—say, does she?"

"Yes, she does," said Peletiah, moving off slowly.

"Well, then, I'll say it. Come back and sit down; I'll say it. Saw, saw, saw. There, now"—as Peletiah, very much delighted, settled back into his place. "Well, you know this was a great big-bug who was buried, and——"

"A big bug!" exclaimed Peletiah, terribly

disappointed. "I don't want to hear of any bugs; tell about a funeral," he commanded loudly.

"I am tellin' you; keep still an' you'll hear it. Well, he was a gre—at big-bug, an'——"

"Who was?" cried Ezekiel, dreadfully puzzled.

"This man who was to be buried—this one I'm tellin' you of. Do keep still, an' you'll hear if you don't stop me every minute."

"You said it was a bug," said Peletiah, in loud disapproval, on the further side.

"Well, so he was," declared Rachel, turning around to him. "Some men are big-bugs, an' some men are only little mean ones. But this one I'm tellin' you about was, oh, an awful big one," and she spread her arms with a generous sweep to indicate his importance.

"Men aren't ever bugs," said Peletiah decidedly.

"Oh, yes, they are."

"No, they ain't," he declared obstinately.

"My mother says we mustn't contradict," put in Ezekiel, with a reproving glance at him across Rachel's lap.

Peletiah unfolded his hands in extreme dis-

tress, but he couldn't say that men were bugs, so he sat still.

"Anyway, they are in the city, where I lived," said Rachel, "so never mind. Well, this funeral was just too splendid for anythin'. In the first place there was——"

"Oh, it's coming," cried Ezekiel, pricking up his ears. "Miss Bedlow's funeral's coming."

Rachel gave a jump that carried her off from the door-stone and quite a piece down the box-bordered path. She was hanging over the gate when the boys came up.

"Where?" she said. "I don't see any."

A small, black, high-topped wagon went by, the old horse at a jog trot, and after it came a two-seated rockaway, and after that a carryall, and around the curve in the road appeared more vehicles of the same patterns, tapering off to a line of chaises and gigs.

"Why, that's the funeral," said Peletiah, in solemn enjoyment, and pointing a finger at it; "it's going by now."

"What!" exclaimed Rachel, horribly disappointed. Then she flew away from the gate and turned her back on it all. "I wish I was back in the city!" she said.

XIII "SHE'S GOING TO STAY HERE FOREVER"

IT was dreadful; and after she had said it, Rachel stood overwhelmed with distress. "Don't you tell your father." She whirled around and clutched Peletiah's sleeve.

"We must," he said; "he's the minister, and we have to tell him everything."

"Well, don't tell your mother, anyway," she begged anxiously.

"We must," said Peletiah again, "because we tell her everything, too."

"Then she'll send me back." Rachel, quite gone in despair, gave a loud cry and threw herself face downward on the grass, where she sobbed as if her heart would break.

This was so much worse than he had imagined, as any possible effect from his words, that Peletiah couldn't speak, but stood over her in silent misery. Seeing this, Ezekiel took matters into his own hands.

"I'm going to run after the funeral and get Ma to come home; she'll be at the top of the procession," and he moved off toward the gateway.

"Stop!" Rachel squealed; then she sprang to her feet. "Don't you stir a step, you!" she commanded.

"They're all hearing you," observed Peletiah, who, seeing Rachel upon her feet, found his spirits reviving, and he pointed to the line of buggies and chaises. "See 'em looking back; my father won't like it."

"Oh, dear me!" Rachel struggled with her sobs. "You shouldn't 'a' told me you had 'em. That ain't a funeral."

"It is, too," declared Peletiah; "it's Miss Bedlow's funeral, and my Pa is going to bury her."

"It ain't, either; an' that's a baker's cart," said Rachel, pointing to the departing hearse with scorn.

"Oh, oh, what a story!" exclaimed Ezekiel, who was just on the point of reproving his brother for contradicting, and he pointed his brown finger at her. "That's got Miss Bedlow in, and they're taking her to the burying-ground, and it's her funeral."

"Well, I don't want to go back to the city," said Rachel hastily, dismissing Miss Bedlow and her funeral and all discussion thereon summarily, and she dug the toe of her shoe into the gravel; "don't let your mother send me back."

"You said you wished you were back there," observed Peletiah severely, fixing his pale eyes on her distressed face, along which the tears were making little paths.

"Well, I don't care. I don't want to go. Don't let her!" She seized his arm and shook it smartly.

"You're shaking me!" said Peletiah, in astonishment.

"I know it, an' I'm goin' to," said Rachel, stamping her foot.

"You ain't going to shake my brother," declared Ezekiel loudly, "and we'll make you go back if you shake us," he added vindictively.

"Oh, dear, dear!" Rachel dropped Peletiah's arm, and she hid her face in her hands. "Don't make me go back," she wailed. "It's too dreadful there, for Mrs. Fisher won't have me if you send me away, 'n' Gran 'll get hold of me somehow—she'll—she'll find me, I know she will," and she shivered all over.

"Who's Gran?" Peletiah drew quite near.

"She's Gran," said Rachel, shivering again. "Oh, dear! don't ask me; and she beat me dreadful, an'——" her voice broke.

"She beat you?" cried Peletiah.

"Awful," said Rachel, cramming her fingers into her mouth to keep from crying. "Oh, dear, dear! don't send me back."

Peletiah took two or three steps off, then came back.

"You may shake me if you want to," he said generously, "and you ain't going back."

"Well, she isn't going to shake me," said Ezekiel stoutly, "and my Ma will send her back if she shakes me, so there!"

"I hain't shook you yet," said Rachel, disclosing her black eyes between her fingers and viewing him with cold disdain.

"Well, you ain't going to," repeated Ezekiel, with decision.

"Her Gran beat her." Peletiah went over to his brother. "She beat Rachel." He kept repeating it, over and over; meanwhile Ezekiel moved about in confusion, digging the toes of his shoes into the gravel to hide it.

"Well, she ain't going to shake me," he said,

but it was in a fainter voice, and he didn't look at Rachel's eyes.

"And you mustn't ask Mother to send her back," said Peletiah stubbornly.

"She ain't going to shake me." It was now so low that scarcely any one could hear it.

"And you mustn't ask Mother to send her back," said Peletiah again. "She's going to stay here just for ever and ever."

There was something in his tone that made Ezekiel hasten to say:

"Oh, I won't."

"And I won't shake you," said Rachel, flying out from behind her hands and up to him, "if you'll only let me stay here; just let me stay," she cried, hungrily.

"Well," said Ezekiel, with a great deal of condescension, "if you won't shake me, you may stay at our house."

So the children went back to the flat doorstone to talk it over, Peletiah saying:

"Maybe you can go to school with us next fall."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Rachel, with wide eyes, and clasping her hands, "I've got to learn a lot first."

"Yes, my father's got to teach you first," said Peletiah.

"Where's he going to do it?" Rachel leaned over to get a comprehensive view of his face.

"In his study," answered Peletiah.

"Where's that?"

"That's where he writes his sermons in, that he preaches at people Sundays," said Ezekiel, finding it very pleasant to be communicative, now that he was quite sure the new girl would not shake him.

"Oh, how nice!" breathed Rachel. "That's scrumptious!"

"That's what?" asked Peletiah critically.

"Scrumptious. Haven't you ever heard that? Oh, what a nin—I mean, oh, how funny!"

"And it ain't nice at all to have my father teach you," said Peletiah, with very doleful ideas of that study.

"Why?" asked Rachel, with gathering dread.

"Oh, he makes you learn things," said Peletiah dismally, drawing a long sigh at the remembrance.

"But that's just what I want to do," cried Rachel, with sparkling eyes; "I'm goin' to learn an' learn, till I can't learn no more."

Peletiah was so occupied in edging off from her that he forgot to correct her speech.

"Yes, I'm goin' to learn," exclaimed Rachel, in a glad little shout, and, springing to her feet, she swung her arms over her head. "I'm goin' to read an' I'm goin' to write, an' then I can write a letter to my Phronsie."

She ended up with a cheese, plunging down on the grass and puffing out her gown like a small balloon.

"You can't do that," she said, nodding triumphantly up at the two boys.

"I don't want to," said Peletiah, sitting still on the door-stone.

"Well, you can't, anyway, 'cause you haven't got a frock. Well, now, let's play," and she hopped to her feet. "Come on. What 'll it be?"

"I'll show you the brook," volunteered Ezekiel, getting up.

"What's a brook?" asked Rachel.

"Hoh—hoh!" Ezekiel really laughed, it was so funny. "She doesn't know what a brook is," he said, and he laughed again.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Rachel, laughing good-naturedly.

"It's water."

"I don't want to see any water," said Rachel, turning off disdainfully; "there's nothing pretty in that."

"But it's awfully pretty," said Peletiah; "it runs all down over the stones, and under the trees and——"

"Where is it?" cried Rachel, running up to him in great excitement. "Oh, take me to it."

"It's just back of the house," said Ezekiel; "I'll show you the way."

But Rachel, once directed, got there first, and was down on her knees on the bank, dabbling her hands in the purling little stream, half wild with delight.

And when the parson and his wife got home from Miss Bedlow's funeral, they found the three children there, perfectly absorbed in the labor of sailing boats of cabbage leaves, and guiding their uncertain craft in and out the shimmering pools and down through the tiny rapids. And they watched them unobserved.

"But I dread to-morrow, when I give her the first lesson," said the parson, as they stood unperceived in the shadow of the trees; "everything else is a splendid success."

"Let us hope the lessons will be, too, husband," said Mrs. Henderson, a happy light in her eyes.

"I hope so, but I'm afraid the child is all for play, and will be hard to teach," he said, with a sigh.

But on the morrow—well, the minister came out of his study when the lesson hour was over, with a flush on his face that betokened pleasure as well as hard work. And Rachel began to skip around for very joy. She was really to be a little student, Mr. Henderson had said. Not that Rachel really knew what that meant exactly, but the master was pleased, and that was enough, and all of a sudden, when she was putting up some dishes in the keeping-room closet, she began to sing.

Mrs. Henderson nearly dropped the dish she was wiping.

"Why, my child!" she exclaimed, then stopped, but Rachel didn't hear her, and sang on. It was a wild little thing that she had heard from the hand organs and the people singing it in the streets of the big city.

Just then old Miss Parrott's stately, ancestral coach drove up. The parson's wife hurried to

the front door, which was seldom opened except for special company like the present.

"I heard," said Miss Parrott, as Mrs. Henderson ushered her in, "that you'd taken a little girl out of charity, and I want to see you and your husband about it."

"Will you come into his study, then?" said Mrs. Henderson. "Husband has gone out to work in his garden, and I will call him in."

Miss Parrott stepped into the apartment in stately fashion, her black silk gown crackling pleasantly as she walked, and seated herself very primly, as befitted her ancestry and bringing-up, in one of the stiff, high-backed chairs. And presently the parson, his garden clothes off and his best coat on, came in hurriedly to know his honored parishioner's bidding.

"I will come to the point at once," said Miss Parrott, with dignified precision, as he sat beside her, and she drew herself up stiffer yet, in the pleasing confidence that what she was about to say would strike both of her hearers as the most proper thing to do. "You have taken this little girl, I hear, to educate and bring up."

"For a time," said the minister, hurriedly.

"Very true, for a period of time," said Miss

Parrott throwing her black-figured lace veil, worn by her mother before her, away from her face. "Well, now, Pastor, it is not appropriate for you to do this work, with your hands already overburdened. Neither should you bear the expense——"

"But I don't," cried Parson Henderson, guilty now of interrupting. "Mr. King pays me, and well, for teaching the little girl until she will be ready for the district school. You see, she has never been in a schoolroom in her life, and it would be cruel to put her with children of her own age, when she is so ignorant. But she is singularly bright, and I have the greatest hopes of her, madam, for she is far above and beyond most children in many ways."

But Miss Parrott hadn't come to hear all this, so she gave a stately bow.

"No doubt, Pastor, but I must say what is on my mind. It is that I have for some time wanted to do a bit of charity like this, and Providence now seems to point the way for it. I would like to take the child and do for her. Let her come to you here, for lessons, but let me bring her up in my house."

There was an awful pause. Parson Hender-

son looked at his wife, but said never a word, helplessly leaving it to her.

"Dear Miss Parrott," said Mrs. Henderson, and she so far forgot her fear of the stately, reserved parishioner as to lay her hand on the black-mitted one of the visitor, "we were given the care of the child by Mr. King, who rescued her from her terrible surroundings, and we couldn't possibly surrender this charge to another. But I will tell you what we might do, husband," and her eyes sought his face. "Rachel might go down now and then to spend the day with Miss Parrott. Oh, your beautiful house!" she broke off like a child in her enthusiasm. "I do so want her to be in it sometimes." She turned suddenly to the visitor.

Miss Parrott's old face glowed, and a smile lingered among the wrinkles.

"And she must pass the night occasionally," she said. There was a world of entreaty in her eyes. "I think so," said Mrs. Henderson, "but we must leave that to Rachel."

And Rachel, in the keeping-room closet, was trilling up and down some of the jigs her feet had kept time to when she, with the other tenement-house children, had run out to dance on the cor-

ner when the organ man came round, all unconscious of what was going on in the study.

"What's that?" cried Miss Parrott, starting. The conference was over and she was coming out of the pastor's study, to get into her ancestral carriage.

"That's Rachel singing," said Mrs. Henderson.

Old Miss Parrott gasped:

"Why, my dear Pastor, and Mrs. Henderson, can the child sing like that?"

"This is the first time she has tried it," said the parson, who had no ear for music and was sorely tried when expected to admire any specimens of it. "But I dare say she will do very well. She is a very teachable child."

"Very well!" repeated Miss Parrott quickly. "I should say so indeed. Well, I will send for the child on Saturday to pass the day and night with me, and then we shall see what we shall see."

With which enigmatical expression, she mounted her ancestral carriage; the solemn coachman, who had served considerably more than a generation in the family, gathered up the reins, and the coach rumbled off.

"Oh, what an awful old carriage!" exclaimed

Rachel, running to the window. "It looks as if its bones would stick out."

"It hasn't got any bones," said Peletiah, viewing it with awe, "and she's awful rich, Miss Parrott is."

"I don't care," said Rachel, running back to her work and beginning to sing again, "her carriage is all bones, anyway."

XIV "CAN'T GO," SAID JOEL

"JOEL—where are you?" Frick Mason raced in, to encounter Polly in the wide hall. "Oh, dear me!"—not pausing for an answer—"all the boys are waiting for him outside. Please tell him to hurry, Polly," for Joel's friends always felt if they could only get Polly on their side, they were sure of success, and he shifted his feet in impatience.

"I don't know in the least where Joel is," said Polly, pausing in her run through the hall. She had promised Alexia to be over at her house at nine o'clock, and there it was, the big clock in the corner stated plainly, five minutes of that hour. "Oh, dear me! I wish I could help you," and she wrinkled up her brows in distress.

Frick sat down on one of the big, carved chairs and fairly whined:

"I've chased and chased all about here, and no one knows where Joel is. Polly, do find him for me," and he began to sniffle.

"Oh, I can't," began Polly impatiently, then she finished, "Dear me! Why, I don't know in the very least where Joel is, Frick!—not the leastest bit in the world."

"Oh, yes, you can find him," said Frick, sniffling dreadfully, and beginning to wheedle and beg. "Do, Polly." He seized her gown. "The boys can't do anything without Joel, and they've sent me for him."

"And I'm sure I can't do anything"—Polly shook her gown free—"so there's no use in asking me to stand here and talk about it, Frick Mason. And just look at that clock—two minutes of nine." She pointed tragically up to the big clock. "And I promised to be at Alexia's——" The last words came back to him as she disappeared out to the veranda and down the steps, racing off as hard as she could.

Frick got off from his chair, took three or four steps hopelessly, then stiffened up.

"I'm going to find him," he announced to himself, and turning down the angle, he knocked at the first door on the left.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Joel, unlocking the door and opening it.

"Oh, you're here." Frick seized him on both

sides, wishing he had twice the number of hands to employ; then he tried to run in, but Joel shook off the grasp, pushed to the door, only leaving the scantiest space to allow of conversation.

"You can't come in," he said steadily.

"Hold on! don't shut the door," cried Frick, pressing up closely and still endeavoring to get a good grasp on some of Joel's clothing. "Ow! you 'most smashed my nose, Joel Pepper."

"You must take your nose away then," said Joel decidedly, "for I'm going to shut the door if you scrouge so."

"Well, let me come in," said Frick, struggling violently. "Say, Joel, don't shut the door."

For answer Joel slammed to the door, and the key clicked in the lock.

"I said I'd do it, if you scrouged and pushed, and I must," he answered, with the air of a man performing his duty. "This is my Grandpapa's writing-room, and you mustn't come in, Frick Mason."

Frick slid down to the floor and laid his mouth alongside the crack, with the feeling that his message would be more impressive delivered in that way, since he was not to be admitted to the apartment to give it in due form.

"The boys want you, Joel; they're all waiting for us outside. Hurry up." Having delivered it, Frick got up to his feet in a hurry, confident that the door would be flung wide, to let Joel come hopping out in delight, and not choosing to be run over in the process.

"Can't go," said Joel, in muffled accents, on the other side of the door.

"What?" roared Frick, not believing his ears.

"Can't go," repeated Joel. "Go right away from this door."

"What did you say?" Frick slid to the floor again and beat his hands on the polished surface. "Say, Joel, we want you to come. We're all waiting for you, don't you understand?" He kept saying it over and over, under the impression that if he only repeated it enough, the door would open.

"And I say I can't go," declared Joel, in a high, wrathful key. "If you don't go away and let this door alone, I'll come out and pound you."

"We're going to the pond," said Frick, exactly as if responding to the most cordial request to furnish the plan. "We've got Larry's boat, and Webb is going to take his father's, and——"

"Ow—go away!" roared Joel, in an awful voice.

"And we're going to take our luncheon and stop at Egg Rock, and——"

The door flew open wildly, and Joel leaped out over Frick, flattened on the floor.

"Didn't I tell you to let me alone?" cried Joel, on top of the messenger, and pommeling away briskly. "Say, didn't I tell? Say, didn't I tell you?"

The noise all this made was sufficient to bring Jane, who didn't stop to drop her broom.

"My goodness me, Master Joel!" she said, running down from the stair-landing, "what are you doing?"

"Pommeling him," said Joel cheerfully, and not looking up.

"Well, you stop it this minute," commanded Jane, waving her broom over the two figures, for by this time Frick had managed to roll over and was now putting up quite a vigorous little fight in his own defense.

"I can't," said Joel; "I promised him."

"Oh, dear me!" cried Jane, bringing her broom down smartly on as much of the surface of either boy as was possible. "I'll scream for

Mrs. Fisher if you don't stop, you two boys. I will, as true as anything!"

"Oh, no, you mustn't, Jane," said Joel. His brown fists wavered in the air and described several circles before they fell at his side; seeing which, Frick slipped out from underneath him and began to belabor Joel to his heart's content. "You mustn't, Jane," howled Joel.

"Now will you come," he cried. "Say, hurry up, Joe, we're all waiting. Come on!" His nose was quite bloody, and a dab here and there on his countenance gave him anything but a pleasing expression.

"Ugh!" cried Jane, with a little shiver. "You boys get right straight up from this floor, or I'll tell Mrs. Fisher."

Joel seized her apron string and howled:

"Jane, don't!"

"Yes, I will, too, Master Joel," declared Jane, twitching away the string; "for such carryings on, I never see. Oh, here's Mr. King; now he'll take care of you both," and she skipped upstairs, broom and all.

It was useless to try to slip away unperceived, for old Mr. King bore down upon them along the hall in his stateliest fashion.

"Dear me! what have we here?" as both boys slunk down as small as possible. "Why, Joel!"—it was impossible to convey greater astonishment in his tone—"I thought you were steady at work."

"So I was," cried Joel, stung to the quick; and jumping to his feet, he fairly beat the old gentleman's arm with two distressed little palms, "and he made me come out. I said I would pound him, and I had to. Oh, Grandpapa, I had to," and he pranced wildly around the tall, stately figure.

"Keep quiet, Joe," said the old gentleman, with a restraining hand; "and, Frick, get up. Oh, dear me!"—as Frick obeyed, bringing his interesting countenance to view, by no means improved by his efforts to wipe off the smears. "What have you boys been about?"

"He wouldn't come out," said Frick, rubbing violently all over his round cheeks, "and the boys sent me for him, and they're waiting now," he finished, with a very injured air.

"Eh—oh! and so they sent you for Joel?" said the old gentleman, a light breaking over his face.

"Yes, sir," said Frick, with a final polish to

his countenance on the cuff of his jacket sleeve, "and won't you please make Joel hurry up and come out, sir? We've waited so long."

"And is that the way you respond to your invitations, my boy?" said Grandpapa, with a grim smile. "I shouldn't think you'd receive many at this rate. So you fell upon him because he asked you to go somewhere, eh?"—with a keen glance into the black eyes.

"No, sir," said Joel, "but he wouldn't go away, and I told him if he didn't, I'd come out and pound him. So I had to."

"Um—now let us see," said the old gentleman, reflecting a bit. "So you kept on at the door, eh, Frick?"

"Yes, sir," said Frick, giving up his countenance as a bad job. "I had to, 'cause the boys are waiting, you see, sir. Won't you please make Joe hurry up and come?"

"Well, now, Frick, I really believe you better go out and tell those boys that when Joel gets ready to join them, he'll make his appearance. Good-bye, Frick." Grandpapa waved him off sociably, and Frick, not exactly understanding how, or why, found himself on the other side of the big front door, in the midst of the waiting

company from which he had been picked out as messenger.

"I wouldn't make such a promise again, if I were you, Joel," observed old Mr. King, gathering up the small, brown hand in one of his own; "it might be a little awkward to keep it, you know. Now, then, here we are,"—turning in at the writing-room. "Well, say no more, but fly at your task," and he seated himself in the big chair before the writing-table and took up his pen.

Thus left to himself, Joel went slowly over to the set of shelves in the alcove, from which Frick's summons at the door had called him. There were several volumes on the floor, and a blank book and some sheets of paper, showing clearly Joe's favorite method of setting to work on making lists, while sprawled on the carpet with all his paraphernalia around him. He threw himself down amongst it all, prowled around for his pencil, which, suddenly dropped when he had deserted his task, had taken the opportunity to roll off by itself. Now it added to his discomfiture by hiding.

"Plague take it!" He scowled, a black little frown settling on his brow. "Where is it?"—

prowling around frantically on the carpet, with hasty hands.

"What is it, Joe?" Old Mr. King, though apparently very busy over at the writing-table, seemed to be quite well aware of everything that went on in the alcove.

"I've lost my pencil," announced Joe, in a dismal voice.

"Oh, well, that's not so bad as it might be," said the old gentleman; "come over and get another, and by and by you can find your own."

Joel advanced to the writing-table and put out a hand for the pencil, which the old gentleman laid within it, but not before he had taken a good look at the chubby face above it.

"So Frick and the boys wanted you, eh?" asked Grandpapa carelessly. "Going somewhere, maybe?"

"Yes," said Joel, not looking up, "they are going to the pond."

"Oh, really?" said old Mr. King. "And you said no, eh, Joel?"

"Yes," said Joel.

"I suppose you didn't want to go, eh, Joel?" said the old gentleman carelessly, and playing with his paper knife.

Joel's black eyes flew wide open, and he raised his head to stare into Grandpapa's face.

"Oh, yes, I did, awfully."

"Then why didn't you go?" asked Grandpapa, just as carelessly, and giving the paper knife an extra twirl or two.

Joel took his gaze off, to regard the pile of books over on the alcove floor.

"Oh, your work?—is that it, Joel?" asked the old gentleman. "So you thought you'd rather stay and finish your hour on it, eh, my boy?"

Joel squirmed uneasily. "I hadn't rather," he said at last, "but I'd got to."

"Eh?" said old Mr. King.

"I said I'd work an hour and not stop," said Joel, as something seemed to be required of him, the old gentleman waiting for him to finish.

"You mean you'd made the bargain to do this work and you couldn't back out?" said Grandpapa.

Joel looked up and nodded quickly.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, yes. Well, now, I mustn't hinder you from your work"—old Mr. King turned briskly to his writing again—"or I shall be as bad as

Frick—eh, Joel?" and he laughed gayly. "Now trot back and go at your task again."

So Joel, fortified with his pencil, marched back to sit on the floor in the alcove and take up his interrupted work, and Grandpapa's pen went scratching busily over the paper, and nothing else was heard except the buzzing of a big fly outside the window, venting his vexation at his inability to get in.

Meanwhile Frick and the knot of boys had drawn off in astonishment and dismay at the failure of their plan to get Joel Pepper into the delightful expedition.

"What was he doing?" demanded more than one boy.

"I don't know," said Frick; "I couldn't get in."

"Oh, now I know; he's got some secret," said Larry Keep, and he whirled around in vexation and snapped his fingers.

"Maybe it's a flying-machine," suggested another boy.

"Phoo! he couldn't make that in his grandfather's writing-room," said Larry, in derision, yet he looked anxious. Suppose Joel Pepper were really busy over such a splendid thing as

that and hadn't told him. "Guess something else."

"I can't think what it is," said Frick, sitting down on the curbstone to become lost in thought —an example to be speedily followed by all the boys, till finally there was a dismal row of them, without a thought remaining of having the expedition on the pond, since Joel Pepper wouldn't come with them.

XV UP IN ALEXIA'S PRETTY ROOM

POLLY was having a bad half-hour with herself, despite all the attractions up in Alexia's pretty room.

"It's no use," she cried, throwing down the little brush with which she was whisking off the dainty bureau-cover. The girls were "setting up" the various adornments that were plentifully strewn about, an occupation that Polly dearly loved, and that Alexia as dearly hated. "I must go home."

Alexia, down on her knees, with her head in the closet, grumbling over the shoe bag, whose contents were in a chronic state of overflow, pulled it out suddenly.

"Why, Polly Pepper!" she exclaimed, in an injured tone. One eye was draped by a cobweb, gained by diving into the closet's extreme corner after a missing slipper, gone for some weeks; and in other ways Alexia's face presented a very unprepossessing appearance. "You said you'd help me with my room this morning."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Polly hurriedly, and running over to Alexia; "but you'll let me off, won't you?—for I've something on my mind. Oh, dear me!"

Alexia hopped up to her feet, the slipper flying off at a tangent, and ran all around Polly Pepper, gazing at her anxiously.

"I don't see anything. Oh, what is it?" she cried.

"You see, the boys wanted to find Joel, and I——" began Polly, twisting her fingers.

"Bother the boys!" exclaimed Alexia, interrupting. "Is that all? They are everlastingly wanting to find Joel. Well"—with a sigh of relief—"we can go back to work again. Why, I must say, Polly, you scared me 'most to death. Oh, dear me! I wish I had let Norah sweep this old closet when she does the room. It's dirty as can be. If Aunt knew it——" The rest of it was lost, as Alexia was down on her knees again, her head back in the closet, with the hope of unearthing more slippers and shoes.

"Alexia, do come out," cried Polly, pulling her gown smartly; "I must speak to you."

"Can't," said Alexia, rummaging away. "There, I've gone and knocked down my blue

silk waist! Do pick it up, Polly; it 'll get all dirt, and then won't Aunt scold!"

As if to make matters worse, a voice out in the hall was heard:

"*Alexia?*"

"Misery me!" cried Alexia, scuffling out backward from the closet, the blue silk waist on her head where it had fallen, and in her sudden exit nearly overthrowing Polly Pepper. "Here comes Aunt. Shut the door, Polly—shut it"—scrambling with both hands to get the waist off, while a hook caught in her light, fluffy hair. And Miss Rhys being too near the door for any such protection as Alexia suggested, in she walked.

"What in the world!" She lifted both hands. "Alexia Rhys, is it possible! I concluded not to go down-town, and came back, and to think of this—playing with your best silk waist!"

"I'm not playing," declared Alexia, in a sharp key, tossing back from her head as much of the waist as she could, "and it hurts awfully"—twitching angrily at the hook.

Polly sprang to her assistance.

"Wait a minute, and I'll get you out," she said.

"And I won't wait," cried Alexia loudly; "it's bad enough to be hooked to death with a horrid old ugly waist, without being scolded to pieces by your aunt."

"Oh, Alexia!" exclaimed Miss Rhys, "to call that beautiful waist an ugly thing!"

"And I'll pull every spear of hair out of my head, but I'll get the thing off. Ow!"—as she began to put her threat into execution.

"Do be still, Alexia," begged Polly, trying to push aside the nervous fingers.

"I won't be still," cried Alexia, casting up a pale eye full of wrath on the side next to Polly, and giving another twitch. "I guess if you'd been hooked up by a horrible old thing, and your aunt came in and scolded you terribly, you wouldn't wait. Ow! Oh, dear me!"

"Then," said Polly, standing quite still, "since you won't let me help you, I'm going home, Alexia."

"Oh, don't," cried Alexia, and she dropped her hands to her side in a flash, the blue silk waist dangling to her head by its hook. "I'll let you help whatever you want to, Polly," she mumbled meekly.

So Polly set to work, Miss Rhys slipping out

of the room. Although Alexia's nervous fingers were now not in the way, still, it wasn't easy to disentangle the hook from the thick, fluffy hair, wound in as it was.

"You've tangled it all up," said Polly, bending over it with flushed face, her fingers working busily, "and it's all in a snarl. Dear me! do I hurt?"

"No, never mind," said Alexia; "'tisn't any matter. Don't go home, Polly." She held her fast by the gown.

"No, of course not," said Polly; "at least not until I get this hook out of your hair. There—oh, dear me! I thought it was quite free. Well, anyway, now it is!" She held up the blue silk waist with a triumphant little flourish, over her own head. "It must be awful to have something fastened to you like that," she said, sympathetically, as she placed the waist on the bed with a sigh of relief.

"Well, I guess you'd think so," assented Alexia decidedly; "it's too perfectly awful for anything. It pulls like a big vulture with his talons holding your hair." She hopped to her feet and shook herself in delight, her long, light braids flying out gayly. "Well, I am glad that

Aunt has gone "—looking around the room, and drawing a long breath.

Polly Pepper stood quite still over by the bed.

"Well—heigh-ho—come on," cried Alexia, dancing over to seize her arm; "let's have a spin." But Polly didn't move.

"Come on, Polly," cried Alexia, with another tug at her arm.

"No," said Polly, "I can't, Alexia."

"What in the world is the matter?" cried Alexia, dropping her arm to stare at her.

"I think your aunt——" began Polly.

"Oh, Aunt!" interrupted Alexia impatiently. "You're always talking about her, Polly Pepper, and she's everlastingly picking at me, so I have a perfectly dreadful time, between you two."

"Well, she is your aunt," said Polly, not offering to stir.

"I can't help it." Alexia, for the want of something better to do, ran over and twitched the table cover straight. "And I know she's my aunt, but she needn't pick at me all the time," she added defiantly. She looked uncomfortable all the same, and ran about here and there trying to get things in their places, but knocking down more than were tidied up. "Why don't you say

something?" she cried impatiently, whirling around.

"Because I've nothing to say," replied Polly, not moving.

"Oh, dear me!" Alexia sent her long arms out with a despairing gesture. "I suppose I've just got to go and tell Aunt I'm sorry." She drew a long breath. "But I hadn't been playing; I was tired to death over that dirty old closet and that tiresome shoe bag, and my hair all hooked up. Well, do come on." She ran over and held out her hand. "Come with me," she begged.

So Polly put her hand in Alexia's, and together they ran out into the hall, to the maiden aunt's room.

"It's perfectly dreadful to board," said Alexia, on the way. "I wouldn't care how little the house was, if Aunt and I could only have one," and she gave a great sigh.

Polly turned suddenly and gave her a big hug.

"Mamsie says you are to come over to our house just as often as possible. So does Grandpapa," she cried hastily; "you know that, Alexia."

"Yes, I know," said Alexia, but she was

highly gratified at every repetition of the invitation. "Well, oh, dear me!"—as they stood before Miss Rhys' door.

That lady sat in her bay window, her fingers busy with her embroidery, and her mind completely filled with plans for another piece when that particular one should be completed.

"I'm sorry, Aunt," said Alexia, plunging up to the chair and keeping tight hold of Polly Pepper's hand.

"Oh!" said Miss Rhys, looking up. "Why, how your hair does look, Alexia!"

Up flew Alexia's other hand to her head.

"Well, it's been all hooked up," she said.

"And I'll brush it for you," said Polly, at her shoulder.

"That 'll be fine," cried Alexia, with a comfortable wriggle of her long figure. "Oh, I'm sorry, Aunt."

"Very well," said Miss Rhys, turning back to her embroidery again. "And, Alexia, your room looks very badly. I'm astonished that you are so untidy, when I talk to you about it so much."

"Well, Polly is helping me fix it up," said Alexia, drawing off and pulling Polly along.

"Now, you see, Polly"—as the two girls were safe once more in the little room, this time with the door shut—"I only got some more pickings by going to Aunt."

"Hush," said Polly, "she will hear you."

"How is she going to hear with the door shut, pray tell?" cried Alexia, with a giggle. "Well, it's over with now. Let's fly at this horrid old room. Dear me!"—as she ran by the window—"do just see those dreadful boys."

At the word "boys" Polly ran too, and peeped over her shoulder.

"Oh, I must speak to Frick," and without more warning, she raced out of the room, and down the front stairs.

"Polly, Polly Pepper!" But Polly being out in the street and nearly up to the knot of boys, Alexia gave up calling and speedily ran after her, to hear her say:

"Oh, Frick, I'll go and try to find Joel for you."

Frick disentangled himself from the group.

"I found Joel myself," he said, "and he wouldn't come."

"Wouldn't come where?" demanded Alexia breathlessly, plunging up.

"Out on the pond." It was Larry Keep who answered.

"And so we've given it all up," said another boy, very dismally.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Alexia, "how tiresome of Joel!"

"Oh, no, no," protested Polly, shaking her head. "I know Joel couldn't go, or else he would. You know that, boys," she said, looking anxiously at them all.

"He's always been before," said Larry, in a dudgeon, "and I don't see what makes him act so now."

"Well, you haven't any right to abuse him, just because he doesn't want to go out with you on the pond," said Alexia warmly, veering round at the first word of blame of Joel from anybody else. "That's a great way to do, I must say."

"And, boys, you know Joel would have gone if he could, don't you?" said Polly again, the little anxious pucker deepening on her forehead.

"Ye—es," said Larry slowly, digging the toe of his tennis shoe into the ground, as no one else said anything.

"Oh, he would, he would," said Polly, clasping her hands tightly together, the color flying

over her cheek. "Something must have happened to keep him back"—as the boys, having nothing more to say, moved off. "Alexia, now I *must* go home, for I'm afraid——" of what, she didn't say.

"I'll go, too," said Alexia, springing after her, wild to find out what the matter could be with Joel Pepper, to keep him from one of his favorite sports on the pond.

"There isn't anything the matter with him," shouted back Frick, over his shoulder, who had caught Polly's last words. "And he could have gone as easy as not; he was in Mr. King's writing-room with the door locked."

"Grandpapa's writing-room, with the door locked!" repeated Polly, turning around in a puzzled way. "Why—I don't see—oh!" Then she gave such a squeal that Alexia hopped across the road in astonishment. "I know now. Dear, splendid, old Joel! Boys!" She was up by them again, and talking so fast that nobody understood for a moment or two what the whole thing was about.

"For pity's sake, Polly Pepper!" Alexia was shaking her arm, the boys crowding around Polly and hanging on every word.

"Don't you understand? Oh, how stupid I've been not to think of it before!—though I didn't know he was to begin this very morning," cried Polly, hurrying on, all in a glow. "Grandpapa has engaged Joel to do some work for him on his books"—Polly didn't think she ought to explain any further about the ten-dollar note—"and so Joel thought he couldn't stop till the hour was up, and——"

"Has he got to work an hour on 'em at a time?" interrupted Larry in amazement, pushing his way nearer to Polly.

"Yes," said Polly, turning her rosy face on him, so glad that she was really making them see that Joel couldn't go with them when he was asked, "he must work a whole hour at a time on them, so you see he really had to stay back." But this part was lost on the whole group.

"Hi—hi!" they shouted, and Larry flung up his cap. "Well, if that's so, we'll go back and get him now; the hour must be up," and off they raced, flinging up a cloud of dust from their heels.

"Whew!" exclaimed Alexia. "Did you ever see such perfectly dreadful boys to kick up such a dust? Oh, dear me, Polly Pepper. Ker-choo!"

When she came out of her sneezing fit, Polly was saying again:

"Oh, how perfectly stupid I am, Alexia!"

But her eyes shone, for it was now all right for Joel with the boys.

XVI THE ACCIDENT

BUT the boys didn't get back after Joel—not just then. A big tallyho coach, in swinging around a corner, bore down upon the struggling crowd, the driver halloing and the horn blowing lustily, by way of a signal to clear the road. This would have been all well enough and easy to avoid, if a string of bicyclists had not selected that very identical moment to appear from the opposite direction. And Larry, whose uncle was in the last-mentioned procession, having a laudable desire to see him and make his relation aware of the fact, turned, waved his cap and his arms with a, "Hi, there, Uncle Jack!" and in another second was under the big wheels, the whole merry party going over him and the laughter and chat still filling the air.

Miss Mary Taylor, having an outside seat, looked over quickly. Hamilton Dyce, sitting next, clambered down.

"Don't be frightened," he said into her pale face.

Half a dozen men were on the ground with him, and the boys swarmed around wildly, getting in everybody's way. The bicyclists, not catching the idea of any accident, were swiftly coasting down the hill, for after all their leader had suddenly changed his mind and veered off just before reaching the scene of the accident.

"Help me down," said Miss Taylor hoarsely.

"Ugh, don't!" said Beth Cameron, with a shiver, poking her parasol well down over her eyes. "I wouldn't see it for all the world"—shivering.

"You can't do any good; better not," said Mr. Dyce, looking up at Miss Taylor.

But Miss Mary continued to say, "Help me down," and she so evidently displayed the intention of getting down without any assistance if it weren't forthcoming, that Mr. Dyce did as he was bidden, and she was on the spot by the time that Larry was drawn out from under the wheels and laid on the roadside grass.

"I'm afraid he's done for, poor beggar," said one of the men.

Mr. Dyce turned Miss Mary completely around

and marched her off to the middle of the road before she knew that such summary treatment was to be accorded her. Then she caught her breath.

"You needn't think to save me," she said, with a little gasp: "I'm—I'm quite strong. I must go. Oh, don't stop me. Think of poor Mrs. Keep!" and she was back in among the group of men and the frantic boys. "Send for Doctor Fisher," she cried, kneeling down by Larry's side.

"No use——" began another man, but Hamilton Dyce cried, "Which one can run the fastest for Doctor Fisher?"

Little Porter Knapp could, there was no doubt of that. All arms and legs was he, and able to get over more ground a minute than any other boy of their set, not excepting Joel Pepper. So, before Mr. Dyce had finished speaking, he was off like a shot, leaving Miss Taylor sitting on the grass holding Larry's poor head, while the whole crowd of men revolved around her, nervous to do something, but not seeing their way clear to find out what would be expedient.

"If those chaps would stop howling!" exclaimed one of the men, in desperation, stalking

off a bit to cram his hands in his pocket, and ejaculate this to a companion.

"It's pretty hard on the kids," remarked the friend, with a glance over his shoulder at Frick and the rest of the boys, who added to the misery by crowding up to the scene and impeding the progress of all would-be helpers.

"He's dead, it's easy to see," observed the first man, nodding over to the group.

"That's a fact, it looks like it," nodded the friend. "Well, it's a bad thing, but no one's at fault. Mac couldn't help it. The little beggar ran right under the horses."

"Oh, Mac's not to blame," said the first speaker hastily, "but it's an awful calamity just the same, to run down a kid. Well, we must pacify the ladies." So the two walked back and up to the side of the coach, when the big hats under the parasols leaned over and allowed their fair owners to be diverted with all sorts of comforting things. And presently little Doctor Fisher came rushing along in his gig, out of which sprang Porter Knapp before the horse could be persuaded to stop.

No one said a word, least of all Miss Taylor, except the Doctor, who ordered them to right

"Oh, Larry," said Miss Taylor gently, bending over him.

and to left, as assistants. And before long, Larry opened his blue eyes.

"Why—where?" he began. He didn't even know he had been hurt—not till afterward when the pain and suffering set in.

"Easy—easy there," said little Doctor Fisher.

"Great Scott!" The young man who had pronounced him dead crammed those hands of his deeper yet in their pockets and gave a whistle.

"Oh, Larry," said Miss Taylor gently, bending over him.

"What is it?" Larry tried to move, and felt a strong hand laid on him just where it made any motion impossible. Beside, a great wave of pain swept him suddenly into such astonishment as well as suffering that all he could do was to shut his eyes and let his head sink back.

"Now, then!" Doctor Fisher glanced up to the coach-load. "All of you get down," he said curtly, and before the women quite knew how, the pretty gowns and hats and parasols were all descending, a gay, fluttering bevy all chattering together.

"Miss Mary, I'll trouble you to hop up there," and a dozen hands helped her into position on

the coach. "Now, then, Mr. Dyce, and you"; he nodded over to Harry Delafield, the little doctor did, then rapidly picked out two more men. "Up with you, please," and quicker than it takes to tell it all, they were in position, and Larry had been lifted gently into their laps, his head on Miss Taylor's arm.

"Ugh!" Betty Cameron gave a worse shiver than before. "How Mary Taylor can!" she exclaimed, with a grimace. "Oh, dear me! I'm as faint as I can be, just to think of it. I should die outright to be up there with him."

"Well, we've got to walk home, I suppose," observed one of the other girls disconsolately, who, now that Larry could really speak, thought it quite time to turn attention to her own discomfort, and she thrust out her dainty shoe.

The boys, when they saw that Larry was really alive, stopped howling, especially as each and all had felt the glare of the eyes back of Doctor Fisher's big spectacles. And they set off on a run by the side of the coach, and as far ahead of that vehicle as possible, as Mac handled the ribbons with his best style, trying to drive as gently as possible for the patient.

"To his home, of course," said the little doc-

tor, turning his spectacles up to Mac. Then he got into his gig, whipped up, and took the lead.

Porter Knapp went across streets and got there first and was leaning over the stone gateway when the little doctor's gig drove up.

"Eh!" exclaimed Doctor Fisher, looking at him over his glasses. "Well, you have a pair of legs! Joel was right; he says you beat everything in running."

Porter looked much pleased and glanced down at his legs affectionately. Then he remembered Larry and sobered at once.

Doctor Fisher, while going up the steps, said in passing:

"Larry 'll pull through all right, I think."

"She's here," cried Porter suddenly. He had heard the words, but something had abruptly come in between, and he wildly dashed at the little doctor. Doctor Fisher turned around and saw, flourishing up to the gateway, a gay little runabout, and in it Larry's mother and sister.

"My goodness!" He was down by its side. And off in the distance, but coming surely and steadily on, was the coach bearing Larry to his home.

"Yes, yes, how do you do? Don't stop," cried the little doctor, waving his hand that was free from his bag of instruments; "go on to the stable."

"Oh, no, I'll stop here." Mrs. Keep had her foot on the step, and put out the hand not occupied with her flowing draperies. "Eleanor is going on to see a friend. Well, how do you do?"

"You had better drive on to the stable," said the little doctor, "both of you."

This time he had such an imperative manner that, thoroughly bewildered, Mrs. Keep stepped back into her seat and motioned Eleanor to obey.

"Isn't he awfully funny!" said Eleanor, turning in at the driveway, more puzzled, if possible, than her mother.

"Yes," said Mrs. Keep, "he is, but then I suppose he has a good deal on his mind. You know they say his practice is getting to be tremendous. Well, we must run in and see him," as they drove down to the stable. "And you can go afterward to see Mary Taylor."

"All right," said Eleanor, and one of the stable boys coming out to meet the pony, they

"Yes, sir," called Joel back, from the alcove.

both jumped out of the runabout and ran up the back veranda steps.

"It's funny he didn't come down this way, if he wanted us to drive to the stable," cried Eleanor. "Mamma, do say you think it's queer. It would be some comfort if you would."

"Well, I will, then," laughed Mrs. Keep, and there stood Doctor Fisher at the dining-room door, and the minute she saw his face she knew that something dreadful had happened.

"Well, Joel, my boy." Old Mr. King, who had been consulting his watch every five minutes, whirled around in his big chair. "Time to lay down the work," he called cheerily.

"Yes, sir," called Joel back, from the alcove.

"And I'm sure if ever an hour was long, this last one has been," the old gentleman was saying to himself. Joel, who was rather stiff in the joints when first getting up from his work on the carpet, now came out feeling his arms, and then indulging in a good long stretch.

"It seems rather good—eh, Joe?—to swing your arms," cried Grandpapa with a laugh, and a keen glance into the black eyes.

"Yes, *sir*," declared Joel, with another stretch,

and wondering if ever anything was so good in this world as to be told the hour was up.

"Take care," warned the old gentleman; "those long arms of yours will have things off from my table. My goodness, Joe! you must really go out of doors and stretch, you make such a sweep," and he laughed again.

"I can reach so far." Joel ran all around the table and stretched out his brown arms. "See, Grandpapa," he cried; then he got on his tiptoes and leaned over to achieve greater and more astonishing results.

"You'll be over on your nose, if I don't rescue you and the things on my table," said Mr. King, bursting into a heartier laugh than ever. "Come on, Joey, my boy, let's get out of doors, in a larger place." So he gathered up one of the sprawling sets of fingers, and summarily marched him out.

"Now I suppose the next thing in order is to race after Frick and those boys," observed old Mr. King, when the garden walk was attained.

"Yes, sir," cried Joel, his black eyes alight and his feet dancing.

"Well, be off with you."

No need to say more; Joel's heels beat the

hastiest of retreats, as he scuttled off at the liveliest pace of which he was capable.

Old Mr. King, left alone, nodded to himself two or three times, and smiled in a pleased way. "The very thing," he said at last, and in as great satisfaction as if he had been talking to a good listener.

XVII JOEL'S ADVENTURE

JOEL rushed along at a breakneck pace to make up for lost time. How good it was to sniff the fresh air, and to be free, and then to think of that hour put into solid work over the book-list! Why, he glowed all over with delight at the very thought.

"Whoopity-la!" Down the bank of Spy Pond into one of the curves most frequented by the boys of his set, he ran. "My! but I'm glad to get here, though! Hey, there?"

There was no response as Joel dashed into what the boys called their camp, a rough enclosure the wealthy men who owned the pond on the outskirts of the town had allowed to be built. As some of the boys were their own sons, every indulgence in the way of using the pond had been granted, and Mr. Horatio King being the largest owner and the most indulgent, Joel's set, to a boy, decided to call it the "King Camp." It was in a knot of pines, and in the summer was

a most attractive place, overrun with vines and creepers and gay with the colored boat-cushions that were always thrown about.

"Hey there!" shouted Joel again, running about within and without the little wooden structure. "Are you all deaf? Hey—whoop-ity-la!" but nobody answered, save a little bird from the tip of the tallest tree.

Joel stood transfixed with amazement; then he dashed off suddenly down a descent to the little cove. "It must be that they are out on the pond," he said to himself, in vexation, and he craned his neck and peered up and down the shining water as well as he was able for the many curves. "But I don't see how they can be, for Larry's boat is here"—he had dashed up again to the camp—"and Mr. Hersey's, that's the one they would take"—surveying the collection of rowboats and dories drawn up on the beach—"and Webb's father's and Porter Knapp's." Besides, there was a goodly number of others, all in such situations as by no means suggested a party expected to be on the pond at short notice that morning.

"Well, I'm going out, anyway," declared Joel, snapping his fingers, "and catch up with them.

Most likely they've taken the fishing-tackle; I won't stop for that." So, pushing off his row-boat, he picked up the oars and headed down the pond in the direction most likely in his mind to overtake them.

But although he pulled lustily at his oars and ran his boat in and out the curves and hallooed and shouted, he didn't catch a glimpse of them; and the pine groves and wooded glens that ran down to the curving bank only echoed his own calls, or sent a bird note out to him. There wasn't the first suggestion of a boy anywhere about.

"Where in the world are they?" cried Joel in vexation, resting on his oars. "Hi—there they are!" He turned suddenly, knocked against one of the oars, it slipped, and before he knew what it was about, there it was in the water. And to make matters worse, the sound that had filled him with delight proved to be a big, black dog, scrambling through a thicket of underbrush, and coming out to stare at him from the edge of the pond.

"Oh, you beggar!" exclaimed Joel, not to the dog, but to the oar drifting off quickly. It was an easy thing, however, so he thought, to recover

it, and he made no special haste to paddle along as best he might after it. Just at this moment another boat came suddenly in sight around a curve. It didn't hold Joel's friends, but a wholly different set, some city boys who had no rights on the pond. And having stolen their opportunity, and helped themselves to a boat down below, they meant to have as good a time as possible, knowing it would probably be their last. So here was a grand chance, a boy alone in a rowboat, and at their mercy, one of his oars drifting off.

"Hi—fellows!" When they saw it, they yelled with glee.

The black dog on the bank, who belonged to them and was following, as best he might, their course, danced about and gnashed his teeth in his rage that he couldn't join actively in the excitement, sniffing at the water and drawing back as it lapped his feet.

"Now then, look alive," cried the one who appeared to be the leader, and the whole crew bent to their oars with a right good will; and grinning all over their faces with the prospect of fun ahead, they made straight for Joel in his boat.

Joel drew himself up, his black eyes flashing, and paddled with all his might. But it was no use; his boat went round and round, or zig-zagged along, and in a trice the unlucky oar was seized by the triumphant crew, as it was drifting off into some lily pads, and drawn with a worse yell than ever into their boat. Good luck! here would be easy game!

"Now then!" There was no limit to their delight as they saluted Joel in every conceivable way best fitted to get him worked up. "How are you, snob? Don't you want your oar?" and such things, every boy contributing at least a few selections to the general hubbub, the black dog on the bank emitting shrill, ear-splitting barks of distress.

"Give me back my oar," roared Joel, sitting very straight and unconsciously rolling up his sleeves.

"Hi there! Come on and fight, if you want to," cried several of the crew, with sneers and catcalls, and they brandished the oar at him over their heads, yelling, "Why don't you come on and fight?"

"If you don't give me back my oar," cried Joel angrily, and paddling for dear life toward

The unlucky oar was seized by the triumphant crew.

them, "it 'll be worse for you, I can tell you. My Grandpapa——"

He was drowned in a storm of yells: "Your granddaddy? Fellows, this baby is talking of his granddaddy," and they screamed in derision, snapping their fingers and swinging the oar as high as they could tantalizingly at him.

Round and round went Joel's boat, describing a series of curves, that despite all his efforts only carried him away from his tormentors. What he would have done, had he reached them, hadn't entered his head, his only thought being to get up to them. In the midst of this interesting proceeding, a sharp clap of thunder reverberated over their heads, to be almost immediately followed by a piercing gleam of lightning. It produced the greatest consternation in the boat-load, and a sudden jump on the part of nearly every boy in it, made it careen, then turn completely over, and before they were fully aware, every single one was in the water, screaming and struggling wildly.

In the upset Joel's oar had been carried out, too; and as it happened to drift toward him, he leaned over the side of his boat, managing to reach it with the other one.

"Don't catch hold of each other," he yelled, his mind intent on helping some of them into his boat. But as well talk to the wind. The boys who couldn't swim—and most of them were in that plight—were grabbing this way and that, to seize upon anything that would give them a support.

"Catch hold of your boat," roared Joel at them. But instead of that, some of them preferred to catch hold of his, the consequence being that it would soon have been upset, had he not screamed at them (and they knew he meant it), "I'll bang you across the head if you try it" —lifting his oar sturdily.

"You fellows who can swim, hold up the others, and I'll take you all off to the bank, if you won't crowd."

And seeing that this was all they could get, and that Joel was as good as his word, one after another was helped in, the others wisely catching hold of the overturned boat—an example speedily followed, till all were either in Joel's boat and rowing quickly off to shore, or hanging to their own craft.

The leader of the crew huddled sheepishly down over his oar, which Joel handed him to do

some of the rowing, and he didn't look at the owner of the boat, till, just as they neared the bank, he glanced up suddenly and said:

"Say, you, I s'pose you'll tell on us."

"What do you take me for?" cried Joel, in extreme disgust, and plying his oar briskly. All this time the rain had come down in torrents, till there wasn't much difference between the boys who had been in the water and the one who had kept out, and the lightning played over their heads in unpleasant zigzag streaks, and the thunder rolled and rumbled.

The leader shivered and ducked till he couldn't by any possibility be said to look at Joel.

"Well, I would if I was you." The words came in a burst from a boy supposed to be in such a half-drowned condition that he wouldn't care to take part in any conversation, who was crouched down in the bottom of the boat. "I'd tell every single thing about it." He raised himself and shook his fist at the leader's very face. "If it hadn't been for you, Mike," he said, "we wouldn't have come."

"Don't fight," said Joel, in consternation at any such settling of their differences in his boat; "you'll upset us all."

"Humph!" the boy in the bottom of the boat sneered. "He won't fight, Mike won't," he said.

And really Mike **didn't** look as if he would, for he crouched and cowered lower yet, till Joel began to say, "Give me the oar," for it wabbled so that it played a small part only in getting the craft to the shore.

"Some other fellow take it," said the boy who had done all the talking. "I would"—he lifted a red and ashamed face—"only my arm——"

"Is it hurt?" asked Joel, rescuing the other oar from Mike, whose nerves seemed to have all gone to pieces.

"D'no; never mind," said the other boy, looking more ashamed still. "Here, Jimmy, you take the oar, and row lively now." So, with Jimmy's help, the boat ran up to the bank.

"There you are," cried Joel, as they were dumped out, to keep company with the big, black dog, who sniffed them contemptuously and walked around their dripping bodies as they sank on the bank. This wasn't the kind of fun he had meant when he followed his master out, and not at all to his taste.

But Joel was just in his element, and when he

brought the rest off from the overturned boat, he couldn't conceal his satisfaction.

"Some one has got to tell about that boat." He pointed to the overturned one.

"I knew you would blab." Mike turned, his shame disappearing, to grow red with passion.

"Shut up." It was the other boy that roared at him, who, injured arm or not, could somehow inspire the former leader with fear. "I'm going to tell myself; an' if any of you fellows has got spunk, he'll tell, too." It was such a battle cry that Mike's head went down. He knew as well as afterward that his leadership was gone, and that every one of the crew had gone over to the other boy.

"Hi—yes, we'll tell." If Jack, their new leader, could decide to, they would follow him, and they yelled it out much better than any one would suppose possible after their fright, turning their backs on Mike.

"That's good," said Joel, bobbing his black curls, from which the rain was streaming, at the whole bunch of boys in approval, and taking up his oars he prepared to move off. "If you'll only tell about the boat."

"Oh, I say"—Jack seeing that he was now the

recognized leader, was going to do the whole thing up in good shape—" we're much obliged, and who are you, anyway?" he broke off awkwardly.

" I'm Mr. King's grandson," said Joel. " Well, good-bye."

" Mr. King's!" Jack gave a roll over and groveled in the wet moss. " Oh, it's all up with us, fellows," he groaned. The black dog, who belonged to him, came and licked him all over, glaring between whiles at Joel, as if he were the cause of the whole trouble. The bunch of boys said nothing, but shivered in silence.

" Well, good-bye," said Joel, as he pushed off, feeling it necessary for some one to speak, " and I hope you haven't hurt your arm much," to the recumbent figure.

" Don't let him hurt these chaps—your grandfather I mean." Jack threw up his head and pointed to the boys. " Only get Mike licked. We'd all of us like that."

" What?" cried Joel over his shoulder, stopping his busy oars.

" Why, when you tell him how mean we used you, don't let him get those chaps into trouble, 'cause——"

"When I tell him!" cried Joel. "What do you mean?"

"Why, of course you'll tell him," blurted Jack. Mike had taken to his heels and was making quick tracks with his sodden shoes through the undergrowth. Things were not going to his taste now.

"See here." Joel made quick passes now with the oars, and brought his boat up alongside the bank. "I'm not going to tell my Grandpapa about what you've done, 'Tisn't any matter."

"You ain't?" cried Jack, getting up so quickly he upset the next boy, who rolled over the big, black dog. "Great Scott! You ain't going to tell the old gentleman?"

"No," said Joel, "I don't care anything about it; you didn't hurt me any."

"Well, if I ever!" It was all that Jack, the leader, could get out. And Joel, seeing there was nothing to wait for, set to work again, and presently amid the rain and the lightning gleams, his boat was only a little speck on the surface of the pond, as viewed by the group of boys on the bank.

XVIII THE COMFORT COMMITTEE

"OH, Mary!" Eleanor Keep seized Miss Taylor's arm and burst into tears. When she could speak she gasped, "What is it, Mary?"

"Hush!" warned Mary Taylor, drawing her off into the little reception-room. "Your mother —we must think of her, Nell."

"Mr. Delafield is telling her something. I know it is dreadful." Eleanor sank upon the sofa, dragging Mary Taylor with her. "Oh, I shall die if you don't tell me right off what *has* happened, Mary."

"Not a word shall you hear until you can control yourself," declared Miss Taylor, wresting herself away from the nervous grasp, and running over to the door she closed it. "Now then, Nell, are you a sensible girl?"—coming back.

Eleanor flung herself down on the sofa, and sobbed:

"Oh, I know Larry is dead and you are trying to keep it from me."

"Larry is not dead," said Mary Taylor.

"Well, he is terribly hurt," said Eleanor, between her sobs. "Oh dear, my only brother, Larry!"

Mary Taylor got down on her knees by the sofa, and took the poor head up to let her own tears fall over it.

"Why, you are crying yourself," exclaimed Eleanor, feeling the drops trickle down her neck. "And you told me not to. Why, Mary Taylor!"

"Of course I am," said Mary. "Now see here: we are both of us very wrong to give way in this fashion; we ought to be seeing to your mother. Get up, Eleanor," and she sprang to her feet. "There, that's right. Come on."

Some one rapped at the side door, and the confusion in the house calling the maids from their duty, the butler belonging to the establishment of the next neighbor, Mrs. Sterling, popped in his head.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said to Mary Taylor, Eleanor being beyond a reply. "Mrs. Sterling has sent for you ladies to come in there and stay until the doctors are through."

At the word "doctors" Eleanor shivered and covered her eyes.

"The very thing," said Mary Taylor; "we'll get your mother in there"; and with a message back to Mrs. Sterling the two young ladies hurried off, and before Larry's mother quite knew how, she was in the beautiful upper room of the stately brownstone mansion, and face to face with its invalid mistress, condemned for years to lie on her sofa.

"I do believe," said Mrs. Sterling, putting out a soft hand, "that everything will be much better than you think. We shall soon have cheering news, I feel quite sure. Gibson, draw up the easy-chair, so—that's right."

Gibson quietly did as bidden, and Mrs. Keep sank into it, and laid down her head with the air of one quite done with the world. To add to the gloom, a terrible thunderstorm broke suddenly.

"Now give me your hand." Mrs. Sterling leaned over and drew it within her own. Seeing all things going on so well, Mary Taylor and Eleanor drew off into the hall.

"Young ladies," said Gibson, coming out softly, "wouldn't you wish to go down into the

drawing-room? Mistress would like to have you make yourselves comfortable. The storm is pretty heavy, and I'll light the gas."

"Oh, no, no," said Eleanor, shrinking at the invitation. "Mary, don't let's go," she whispered; "I should die there in that big, stiff room."

"We'll sit just here," said Mary Taylor. "Come on, Nell," and down they both got on the top stair, huddling up together, while the storm raged outside in its fury.

"Oh, young ladies!" exclaimed Gibson, starting, "I'll get you some chairs if you want to sit in the hall."

"We like this," said Mary Taylor; "please, Gibson, don't feel troubled." So Gibson went back to her mistress' room, and Mary put her arm around Eleanor, and patted her hair as she cuddled up to her neck.

"Mary, I like you so much," sobbed Eleanor, in a muffled voice, "because you don't try to say something to comfort me."

Mary kept on patting the pretty hair, with anxious ears for the messenger to come from the Keep household. Presently out came Gibson again.

"I'm going out to bring in those boys," she said; "Mistress wants it."

"What boys?" asked Mary quickly.

"The whole of them," said Gibson; "they've been hanging around ever since Master Larry was brought home, and——"

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Eleanor faintly.

"And Mrs. Sterling wants them invited in here to wait?" exclaimed Mary. "How kind of her! Now, then, Nell, that's work for you and for me: we must help those boys to get a little comfort"—as Gibson went quickly down the long stairs on her errand.

"Oh, I can't," cried Eleanor, burrowing into the soft neck.

"Yes, you can."

"I'm his sister. And you can't expect me to see them."

"Yes, I do," said Mary firmly; "it's exactly what you ought to do. I'm going down to welcome them, and you must come too. Come on, Eleanor; we've simply got to do it."

Eleanor, seeing nothing for it unless she were to be left alone on her stair, which would have been the last thing to be endured, got up and followed slowly, to be met at the big door leading

to the side porch by the company of gloomy-faced boys.

"Well, boys," said Mary cheerfully, "I'm glad you've come to help Eleanor and me."

Every boy looked up in great surprise, for they all supposed they were left to comfort themselves.

"Can't we sit in the dining-room?" asked Mary, with a thought for the cheerful red carpet and curtains.

"Mistress wants them to come up into her sitting-room," said Gibson.

"Her sitting-room!" exclaimed Mary.

"Yes, Miss. She says they can help Mrs. Keep and her," said Gibson, standing with folded hands deferentially, but yet quite expecting the command to be carried out.

The boys stood up a little taller yet. Evidently they were thought worthy of consideration in the way of administering consolation instead of hanging around, useless creatures in everybody's way.

"In that case," said Mary Taylor, "we'll all go upstairs at once."

So they all filed up the long flight, and Gibson held open the door, and Mrs. Sterling from

her sofa called out, "Boys, you don't know how glad I am to see you all." And just as they began to feel a little bit of hope down in their hearts, it was so much easier all bearing the suspense together, a light tripping step came up the staircase, and little Doctor Fisher's big spectacles were thrust in the doorway.

"Just right. Very sensible." He beamed at them all, and darted over and took the poor mother's hand.

"Your boy is all right," he said. "His collar bone is broken, to be sure, but it is a beautiful fracture. And he has some bruises. Thank the Lord it is no worse."

There was a rustle back of him. Then two or three boys broke from the group and fell upon him in the rear.

"Is that true?" the foremost one shouted.

"Eh?"—little Doctor Fisher whirled around —"yes indeed, true as gospel. Oh, see here now," as the whole bunch made a mad plunge for the hall. "Come back here, boys."

Every single one came slowly back, except Frick; he had cleared the space to the top of the stairs, and was now making his quickest time on record down the flight.

"You are not to cheer; I see you want to," and Doctor Fisher gave a little laugh.

"Yes, sir," Curtis Park answered for the rest.

"Well, you——"

"Doctor Fisher"—it was Mrs. Sterling who interrupted, and she smiled—"I should very much like to hear that cheer now."

"*Ma'am!*" exclaimed the little doctor, gazing at her over his spectacles.

"Oh, it would do me good, I assure you," said Mrs. Sterling, leaning back in a satisfied way against her pillows. "So, if you please, boys, let me hear it at once"—smiling at them.

And they gave it then and there, the poor mother in all this confusion getting time to recover herself.

And then three more for the little doctor. And then one of the boys, the least likely to have courage to propose it, piped out:

"Let's give her three"—pointing to the hostess.

How pleased the poor invalid was, and how she beamed at them all! And when Doctor Fisher saw that, he was so well satisfied that he shook hands with them all quite around the circle.

"Now I must go. I'll look in again on your

boy in an hour, Madam"—to Mrs. Keep. "Meantime, I'd stay over here, for I've sent for a nurse from the hospital; he must be kept quiet a spell. Good-day," and he was off.

"Now, boys"—there was a pretty pink spot in either cheek, as Mrs. Sterling turned to them —"do you know, I've thought of a plan by which you might do something for Lawrence?"

"What—oh, what?" They crowded up to her sofa. Gibson, from the doorway where she had retreated, to be within call, looked a little anxious, but catching a glance from her mistress, smoothed out her face again.

"What is your plan?" asked Curtis. It really seemed as if the boys had been accustomed to gather in that room, by the way in which they now crowded up as comrades entering into anything that might be proposed.

"You know that before long Lawrence will be able to see you, we hope," began Mrs. Sterling, in her cheeriest way. "Gibson, push up that pillow a little more."

"Oh, I will," cried Curtis, springing forward.

Gibson, in great trepidation at any one performing the office for her mistress, started to do

it, but Curtis was already most gallantly, if a trifle awkwardly, pushing up the pillow, giving it a rousing thump that got on the nerves of the maid.

"You should have waited for me," she said tartly.

"Never mind; that is all right." Mrs. Sterling smiled up at him where he stood, the hot blood in his face, and his eyes downcast. "I'm very much obliged to you, Curtis. I guess you are accustomed to do it for your mother," she said encouragingly.

"I do—I am," he said incoherently, beginning to feel better. It was only Gibson who was cross, he reflected; Mrs. Sterling herself was as nice as she could be.

"Well now, if I were you," said Mrs. Sterling, turning on her pillow to get a good look at them all, "I'd form a committee, a comfort committee, to think up things that will interest Lawrence. And by and by the doctor is going to let you go to see him, and——"

"What things?" The small boy who had proposed the cheers for Mrs. Sterling, now pushed to the front, so as to get a good look at her. "Tell me, please, what things?"

"Well, you can cut out funny things from the magazines and papers for one thing," said Mrs. Sterling, quite delighted at the success of her plan so far, "and the nurse can read them to him."

"I've got a lot of *Punch* numbers," cried one boy.

"And *Life*," said another.

"And oceans of magazines." They all shouted one thing, and another. Gibson, who by this time was tired of popping her head in and out, had withdrawn to a little room opening out of her mistress' apartment, and taken up her sewing, quite convinced that far from its being a cause for alarm, everything was going on finely.

"Well now, just see how much pleasure that will give him," Mrs. Sterling was saying.

"What else?" asked the small boy.

"Then has any one of you any puzzles?" asked Mrs. Sterling, "or conundrums? Don't you think that is fine, to have something to think of beside dismal things, when you lie in bed?"

Curtis Park was just in his element here, for he dearly loved puzzles and conundrums. And presently Mrs. Sterling and he were busily talking over this and that kind, and book, and collec-

tion, until finally the small boy pulled the fringe of her pink crocheted shawl.

"I want to know what else?"

"Dear me!" Mrs. Sterling looked up quickly, to give a little laugh. It wasn't loud, but so cheery and sweet that Gibson, in the little outer room, dropped her sewing in her lap. "Thank the Lord!" she said, and wiped her eyes.

Frick, meanwhile, too excited to hear the doctor call them to come back, had darted out of the house, with no thought for the rain, but with one wild desire—to find Joel Pepper. And as he had a perfect faculty for sprinting, and cut through, with a dash, all the cross-streets, he soon found himself for the second time that day at the King mansion.

But this second time he was no more fortunate than the first. For although he was willingly admitted to Mr. King's writing-room, it was to see that gentleman look up and say with the most genial of smiles:

"Ah, Frick, my boy, well, this time it's all right, isn't it, since I let Joel go down to you?"

"Joel hasn't been with us," blurted out Frick. Then he leaned against the big writing-table,

speech all gone, for he began to feel terribly tired, and it had been nothing but one long disappointment all day.

Old Mr. King laid down his pen and looked Frick all over.

"Oh, no, he hasn't," declared Frick, shaking his head dismally; "we haven't any of us seen him, and Larry Keep has been run over by Mr. MacIlvaine's tallyho, and most smashed up." Then he stopped suddenly, his cup of woe being empty.

"The first thing to do is to find Joel," said Mr. King to himself, anxiously. "The storm is almost over, to be sure"—glancing out of the window—"but where can he be?" He hurried across the room and touched the electric button. "You haven't the least idea, Frick, where to look for him, eh?"

"No, sir," said Frick miserably.

Thomas popped his head in, to be given the order to have one of the rainy-day carriages brought round. Just then, in ran Jasper. He had been caught by the sudden shower over at Pickering Dodge's.

"Father," he cried, his face glowing, "I've come home as soon as it slacked up a bit. Why,

you are not going out?"—seeing the old gentleman beginning to don his mackintosh.

"Yes, I am," said Mr. King grimly, "going to do just that very thing, Jasper."

"Oh, let me, Father." Jasper sprang to his side eagerly, then looked in a puzzled way over to Frick.

"It's Joel," said Frick, feeling that it was expected of him to furnish an answer.

"Joel?" cried Jasper, the color going out of his cheek.

"Yes, Joel can't be found," said old Mr. King, speaking lightly to hide the dismay he really felt. "It's all right, of course; he's probably at one of the boys' houses; only as he was to join Frick, why, I'd prefer to look him up a bit. Well, there's Thomas"—glancing out of the window.

"Oh, let me go for him," begged Jasper. "I can find him. Surely, you don't need to, Father; don't, pray, in all this rain."

"I am going after Joel," declared his father, quite obstinately, "so say no more about it, Jasper"—moving past him to the door. "Come, along, Frick, my boy, you might as well come, too."

"Let me go, too," cried Jasper. "Oh, Father, can't I? I can at least help." He didn't say "take care of you," but he really felt anxious to the last degree.

"Yes, yes," said his father, "of course you may come if you like." So Jasper, well pleased, rushed for his mackintosh, and all three got into the carriage, and Thomas whirled them off in his best style.

"It isn't really worth while to worry Mrs. Fisher," said old Mr. King when well on the way, "for we shall probably soon run across Joel as bright as a button, and gay as a lark. Bless me, how this rain comes down!"

XIX JOEL'S NEW FRIEND

BUT no Joel " bright as a button and gay as a lark " came in sight. Instead, at a corner they were turning rapidly, Mr. King in desperation giving the order to drive to one of the boys' houses most likely to attract Joel's attention this morning, Thomas came to an abrupt halt that nearly threw the horses back on their haunches.

" What are you about there? " he cried in vexation. " Can't you keep out from under the horses' heels, I'd like to know? "

The boy thus addressed paid not the slightest attention to the irate coachman, but advanced to the carriage door. He seemed to have something the matter with his arm that would evidently have given him a good deal of bother had his mind been on anything but the desire to attract Mr. King's attention.

But that gentleman, violently jolted by the sudden pull-up of the horses, not being in the best frame of mind, called out testily, " Bless me,

what is the man stopping for? Drive on, Thomas," and looked directly over his head. Seeing which, the boy clambered up the carriage step and hung on with one hand, but so much determination was in his eyes that old Mr. King fumed out: "Make the scoundrel get down, Jasper."

"What do you want?" asked Jasper, trying to make it as pleasant as possible, before the more summary treatment set in.

"I've got to speak to him," said the boy. Thomas, gathering up the reins in one hand and the whip in the other, looked around with fury in his eye. "Shall I give him a lick?" he asked.

"No, no," said Jasper hastily, "keep quiet, Thomas."

"I've nothing to say to you," cried Mr. King in his most pompous way, and with a stately wave of his hand, "so take yourself off, boy."

"Father——" began Jasper, in a distressed tone.

"And be quick about it." The old gentleman fairly roared it out. "Thomas, drive on."

That functionary, with a very dissatisfied expression that he hadn't been allowed to use his whip when he got it all ready so nicely, now

cracked it at the horses. The boy, with one hesitating glance at Jasper, slid off the carriage-step down to the street, and yelled defiantly up into Mr. King's face as the brougham spun off:

"I was going to tell you where your boy is."

"Father!" exclaimed Jasper, with a white face, "he must know where Joel is. Thomas, *Thomas, stop!*" For Thomas, having no other way to vent his vexation, took it out in driving as fast as possible, so he didn't hear what was going on in the coach.

"Eh?" Mr. King was saying in bewilderment. At last Jasper succeeded in getting his wishes known, and once more the horses were jerked back, for the summons was quick and sharp.

By this time the boy was off, and although Jasper peered this way and that, he could see nothing of the old blue cap that had adorned the head thrust over the carriage door.

"He knows something about Joel, Father, you may depend," persisted Jasper; "we must find him."

Frick, who had been ready to cry, all huddled down in his corner, now sat straight, for it didn't seem to be just the time for tears, and in a min-

ute he had scrambled past Mr. King, and hopped out.

"I'm going to find him," came back on the air, as he shot off.

"Do you wait here, Father," said Jasper, following him, and leaping out, "and we'll get the boy."

But the boy, quite willing to tell whatever story there was on his mind when he jumped on the carriage step, was now of a different mind, and he ran like a deer, first down one street then another. At last, finding himself pursued by some one not at all inclined to easily give up the chase, it suddenly dawned on him that his blue cap might possibly be a means of tracing his course. So he twitched it off and tucked it under his well arm. This made it more difficult for Jasper, whose footsteps were fast gaining on him, to follow him accurately, and for the first time a horrible moment came to the pursuer when he thought that after all the boy might escape; but Frick, who had seen Jasper's nimble progress around a corner, ran down a side street, then across a garden, and came plump into the face of the boy.

"Here he is," cried Frick, the breath almost

knocked out of him by the encounter. He had grasped whatever he could first lay his fingers on and held to it firmly. It proved to be the arm for which the boy had not appeared to have much use.

Once caught, the boy gave a groan, then started to run. Frick being smaller, it might be an easy matter to shake him off, even with only one available arm.

"No, you don't get away this time," said Frick, for the tall boy had him in hand now, and was marching him back to the carriage at a pace much more comfortable for all concerned. "What have you to tell us?" he was being asked.

"I would have told you then," said the boy doggedly. He couldn't help but show some suffering in his face, and Jasper, looking down to see its cause, found one arm hanging in a very peculiar manner. "You've hurt your arm," he said abruptly. "Frick, take care"—to the boy, not at all particular what he took hold of if he only got a good grip.

"Well, he shan't get away," said Frick decidedly, nipping up the end of the jacket nearest to him.

"How did you hurt your arm?" asked Jasper.

Despite all his anxiety about Joel, and an awful feeling that in some way an accident had occurred that had enveloped them both, he looked into the face beneath him with real concern.

"None of your business," the boy was going to say, but instead he turned away his face, then brought it back, and defiance was written all over it. "He sassed me, that old fellow in the carriage. Did you s'pose I'd tell him after that?"

"He's dreadfully anxious," said Jasper, ignoring everything else. "You see, Joel's been gone in all this storm, and we don't know anything in the world where he is."

"I do," said the boy.

"Then, if you do"—Jasper stopped suddenly and brought his keen dark eyes to bear on the rough, defiant face—"I just hope you will tell me. And I know you will," he added, after a pause in which Frick fastened his gaze on them both wildly, luckily without discovering any use for his tongue.

The boy swallowed hard, dropped his eyes for a moment, then looked up.

"He was out on the pond."

"Out on the pond!" echoed Frick, and his

hand nipping the jacket-end fell nerveless to his side.

"No one told you to speak," said the boy sharply, turning on him, "so you shut up."

"But what was he doing out on the pond in such a storm?" asked Jasper. His lips were white, but he didn't allow his eyes to waver, for it was better to have the whole story before getting back to his father.

"It didn't rain till after we'd had the row," said the boy.

"Had the row?" It seemed an eternity to Jasper, for Joel perhaps even now might be in peril, before the next question was answered. "What row?"

"Yes," said the boy, as if he were going to add, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" The next moment, he had made up his mind to tell all there was to tell. It wasn't exactly clear why, but he was giving the account in a very few words, leaving it where it ended with his seeing Joel rowing off down the pond.

And presently the two who had hopped out of the carriage, with the new boy and the one who had thrust his head in over the door, were seated in the brougham, and Thomas had turned his

back on the city streets and was driving off at a furious pace for Spy Pond.

Frick collapsed now and mumbled distractedly, "Oh, dear! now Joel's——" what, he didn't trust himself to say. "And Larry's 'most killed, and——"

Jasper interrupted him sharply, "What do you say, Frick?" for it was the first hint of anything gone wrong with any of the other boys.

Then out came that story to add to the general misery, and old Mr. King sat very straight and kept saying, "Bless me! Tell Thomas to drive faster," and "Oh, bless me!" again, as he glanced over at the boy.

But no Joel. They pranced, the horses did, shaking off the rain from their wet manes, around as much of the pond as was adapted to carriages, and Jasper and Frick got out and explored the rest, at least wherever Joel would be supposed to put into port, the boy holding up the arm that appeared not to be in its usual condition and going along, too, yet unable to add any information to his original statement. At last: "Probably Joel's gone home"—it was all Jasper could do to get the words out of his white lips.

Without a word old Mr. King sank back, and

waved his hand, which meant "Yes," settling down amongst the cushions hopelessly, while their faces were turned homeward.

"Hullo!" Unmistakably Joel's voice, and there he was, wet and dirty, and waving frantically from a side street for them to stop, as he made his best time to the corner.

Jasper threw wide the door. "*Joe!*" he cried. Thomas pulled up again, the horses by this time having become so well accustomed to this method of bringing up that they did it quite well, and there was a great to-do in the coach.

"I've been calling and calling," panted Joel, blowing like a porpoise, and running up with red cheeks, "and you wouldn't stop," he added in a very injured way.

"Well, we didn't hear you, you beggar," cried Jasper. "Come, get in with you"—putting out both hands to assist in the process. "Where have you been, Joe?" for old Mr. King was beyond talking.

"I've been——" began Joel, glad enough to hop in; "why, where——" as his black eyes fell on the boy in the corner.

Frick had tried to swarm all over him, but Joel put out an unsteady hand.

"I came to tell," said the boy, seeing he was expected to say something.

"Oh, don't," cried Joel involuntarily; "'tisn't any matter; I don't care."

"Well, it's all out, Joe," said Jasper affectionately, who couldn't stop patting his back. Frick flew over to the opposite side and let Joel snuggle up to the old gentleman. "I'm here, Grandpapa," he said happily.

"Oh, bless me! Yes, my boy!" said old Mr. King brokenly, and fondling the little brown hands. "Well, we must get you home and out of these wet clothes as soon as possible. I don't know what your mother will say. Oh, dear me, Joe!"

"Pooh!" cried Joel, "I'm not wet."

"You're wet as a drowned rat, Joe," declared Jasper, bursting into a laugh, which was such a relief to all concerned that in a minute it really seemed like a pleasure excursion. But Joel pulled himself up.

"Oh, I'm going to see what's the matter with Jack's arm," and he leaned over and put his hand on it.

"Nothing," said Jack, trying to pull it away, but Joel held on.

"'Tis, too," he said. "You're going to have it fixed. Grandpapa, won't you take him to Doctor Fisher's office? Please do."

At this Frick pricked up his ears. "Doctor Fisher isn't——"

"Frick," began Jasper desperately, "look out and see if it rains."

Frick stared in amazement, and even Joel bobbed his head over at Jasper.

"Why, doesn't it rain on your side?" he cried, his black eyes very wide.

"Never mind; do as I tell you," said Jasper, nowise disconcerted. So Frick reported that it did rain; and then Jasper began to talk so fast that Joel had no time to get in a word at all, although he tried with all his might.

"See here," he shouted at last, and his voice rang clear above every other noise, "can't we take him to Doctor Fisher's office—can't we, Grandpapa? Make Thomas turn about and take us there"—he fairly howled it now.

"And Doctor Fisher won't be there," screamed Frick, on just as high a key.

"Why not?"

It was impossible to stop the dreadful news of Larry's accident from coming now. And in

a minute Frick had it all out in a burst, quite unconscious of Jasper's efforts, and well pleased at having something important to say.

"Larry's been run over by Mr. MacIlvaine's tallyho, and 'most smashed to death."

XX THE COOKING CLUB

"OH, my goodness me!" Alexia gave a jump, then ran for the closet.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Polly, standing quite still in the middle of the room, the lightning flash and the sudden peal of thunder coming without warning.

"Oh, I'm scared to death," cried Alexia, burrowing frantically; "come in here, Polly Pepper. Are you killed?" she screamed.

"No," said Polly, "and I don't believe there 'll be another as bad."

"Oh, come in here. Ooh!" cried Alexia, in muffled accents, as she huddled up against the clothes.

"Oh, Polly!" It was Miss Rhys: her embroidery, cast aside at the sudden storm-burst, was dragging behind her, and she was wringing her hands. "Did you ever see anything so dreadful?"

"I don't believe there'll be another as bad,"

said Polly again, finding nothing more of consolation to offer.

"And where is Alexia?" And without waiting for an answer, Miss Rhys paced nervously up and down the room, still wringing her hands. "And of course there will be more; there, there it comes," and she ran, the embroidery-piece still hanging to her gown, into the closet.

"Oh, Aunt," cried Alexia, with a squeal, "you scared me 'most to death; I thought I was struck!"

"Why, are you here, Alexia?" gasped Miss Rhys, when she could recover herself enough to speak. "Well, this is truly a dreadful storm," and she clutched her with shaking fingers.

"Yes, I am here," said Alexia. "Don't pinch so, Aunt—ow! My arm is all black and blue, I know it is."

"It's no time to think of such little things, Alexia," replied her aunt severely; "it may kill us both."

"Well, that's no reason I should be all pinched to death," grumbled Alexia, forgetting the thunderstorm in her present discomfort and edging off as well as she could. "The closet is dreadfully small, Aunt."

"It's quite large enough, I'm sure, to protect us," said Miss Rhys, hanging tightly to her with trembling fingers. "Dear me! any minute may be our last."

"Well, I'm not going to be smothered to death," declared Alexia, struggling to work her way past her aunt.

"Alexia!" exclaimed her aunt.

"I'm going after Polly." Alexia out in the middle of the room flung her arm around Polly. "Oh, misery!—where?" as a vivid flash seemed to hop right in the window. "Oh, Polly, come!" She clutched her wildly.

"Where?" said Polly. "We can't get away from it, Alexia; it's just everywhere."

"Oh, I don't care—anywhere—in the coal-scoop," cried Alexia, frantically dragging her along. "I shall just die, Polly Pepper, and here you stand like a stick."

"Well, there's just no use in running," said Polly, but seeing Alexia's distress she suffered herself to be led, and downstairs the two girls sped, and into the landlady's room, the first door to stand ajar.

"I'm coming in," announced Alexia, without ceremony, "for I'm scared to death," and she

dragged Polly Pepper after her. "Did you ever see such a thunderstorm, Mrs. Cummings?"

"It is pretty bad," a voice answered. It wasn't Mrs. Cummings, as she had hurried to oversee the maid close the windows through the house, but another of the boarders, who, like Alexia, had selected this apartment for a refuge.

"Oh, dear me!" Alexia sank down upon the sofa, being careful not to relinquish her hold of Polly, and dragged a cushion over her face. "Is that you, Mr. Filbert"—bringing out one eye to stare at him.

"I think so," said Mr. Filbert, a little thin old man sitting over in the corner and leaning forward over his cane. He spoke cautiously, as if not quite sure. "Yes, it *is* a bad storm," he repeated decidedly. "Where is your aunt?"

"She's up in the closet," said Alexia, pulling the sofa-cushion over her own and Polly's face as well. "There, we can't see it at any rate, if we are going to be killed."

"Up in the closet?" repeated Mr. Filbert.

"Yes. Oh, Polly, do you suppose it's lightening and thundering now?"—as the two girls cuddled up closer together on the roomy old sofa, the cushion crowded up over eyes and ears.

"I suppose so," said Polly, very much wishing she could say "No."

"Oh, dear me! I'm smothered to death," grumbled Alexia, "and I'm so hot"—wriggling discontentedly.

"So am I," said Polly.

"What did you say? Your aunt was in the closet?" little old Mr. Filbert was asking; and receiving no reply, he kept on.

"Oh, do hear him," whispered Alexia, back of the sofa-cushion; "he is so tiresome, asking the same thing over and over."

"Well, do answer him," said Polly.

"I have, once," said Alexia.

"Is your aunt in the closet, did you say?" Mr. Filbert kept on, with the impression that a reply would soon be coming if he only held up the conversation at his end of it.

Alexia dashed down the sofa-cushion with a nervous hand. "I can't breathe; let's get out, Polly," and she flew up, to sit quite straight. "Yes, my aunt is up in the closet, Mr. Filbert. Whee! Oh, I am so scared, Polly Pepper!"

"She'll be struck there quicker 'n any other place she could pick out," declared the little old gentleman positively.

Alexia hopped off from the sofa and ran on anxious feet to his chair.

"What did you say, Mr. Filbert? and how do you know?" she cried, all in one breath.

"The chimney closets always catch the lightning first," said Mr. Filbert cheerfully; "you see, it——"

Alexia dashed off, ran through the hall and up to her own room. "Aunt, Aunt," she cried, thrusting her head into the closet, "you'll be struck in there, Mr. Filbert says so. Come out, Aunt."

There was no response, and Alexia, now in mortal terror, plunged into the closet.

"Come, Aunt. Oh, my!" as a clap of thunder sent her plunging in headlong. "Why, where——" for grope as she might, clear up to the end, among the clothes and the shoe-bag, no Miss Rhys was to be found.

"Oh, dear, dear!" Alexia began to whimper, feeling all around the floor with terror-stricken fingers. "Aunt, where are you? Oh, she's been struck and she's dead, I know she is! Polly Pepper," she screamed, tumbling out of the closet to rush to the head of the stairs, "come up and help me find Aunt."

"Alexia!" Miss Rhys, concluding not to be left alone in the closet when the two girls ran downstairs, had hurried out after them, and now appeared from the hall corner where she had crouched. "Don't scream so."

"Oh, Aunt!" cried Alexia, throwing her arms around her, "you haven't been struck, have you? Oh, do say you haven't."

"Why, of course not; don't you see I'm here?" said Miss Rhys. "There, child, take care, you're mussing my lace collar," and she edged off from the nervous fingers. "We'll go downstairs, I think, and stay with Mrs. Cummings."

"If you're really sure you are not struck," said Alexia, eying her askance, as if in considerable doubt, "we'll go; and Polly Pepper is there and that tiresome old Mr. Filbert."

"If Polly is there, she must stay to luncheon," said Miss Rhys, gathering up her skirts and preparing to descend the stairs.

"Oh, how fine!" exclaimed Alexia, hopping after, losing sight of the thunderstorm in the delight of having Polly Pepper to herself for so many hours. "Oh, Aunt, what's that tagging after you?"—catching sight of the piece of embroidery dangling from her aunt's long figure.

"I see nothing," said Miss Rhys, turning around with her head over her shoulder.

"Well, do stand still, Aunt," cried Alexia, "a minute."

"What is it?" Miss Rhys kept saying, trying to see for herself.

"Your centerpiece—oh, dear me!" Alexia by this time had it free, and burst into a laugh as she held it up.

"Well, now, I expect I have dragged off my green floss," exclaimed her aunt, in irritation. "I am quite sure of it."

"Well, 'twould be in the closet," said Alexia, who didn't relish offering to go back, "'twon't hurt it to stay there a little while."

"I must find it," said Miss Rhys decidedly. And Alexia, wild to go down to tell Polly Pepper she was to stay to luncheon, flew over the stairs, leaving her aunt to get her green floss as she could.

"But I can't," said Polly, when Alexia had hugged her and danced around her to her heart's content; "I must go home."

"Why, Polly Pepper, you can't ever go in this awful rain."

"It isn't going to rain much more," said Polly,

running over to the window to flatten her face against the pane.

"You'll be struck if you do that." Little Mr. Filbert looked after her in disapproval. "The window is the worst place in a thunderstorm; you see, it——"

"Oh, that's what you said about the chimney closet," said Alexia, in scorn, "and there can't be two places that are the worst."

"Oh, Alexia," said Polly, looking back from the window.

"Well, he's so tiresome," said Alexia, putting her arm around her and gazing out of the window; "that's just the way he goes on at the table every single day. Oh, see it rain, Polly Pepper!"

"It's slackening," said Polly, peering up at the drops, that really were beginning to fall with little spaces between. "And Mamsie will send for me soon, I guess."

"Oh, well, it will begin again most likely," said Alexia. "I hope this thunderstorm will last till ever so late this afternoon."

"Oh, Alexia Rhys!" cried Polly, in great distress, and whirling away from the window, "don't wish that. Why, I must get home."

"Well, I do," said Alexia, bobbing her light hair till the fluffs settled over her forehead, "for then you'd stay. You haven't been over here in ever and ever so long, Polly Pepper," she said, in an injured voice, "and I've got so very much to talk with you about."

"Well, let's talk now, then," said Polly, with a sigh, yet feeling quite sure that she would soon be sent for to go home.

"Come over to the sofa then," said Alexia. So they ran over, and together settled as far back into the corner as they could, pushing up one of the cushions comfortably behind them.

"Well, now, you begin," said Polly.

"Oh, no—you," said Alexia, having no notion of doing the talking, for it was always great fun to listen to Polly Pepper.

"Why, I thought you said you had ever so much to talk over," said Polly.

"So I have," said Alexia coolly, "we always do have; you know we do, Polly. Well, now begin."

"But it's your place to begin first," said Polly decidedly, "because you said you had something to talk over. So what is it, Alexia?"

"Well——" Alexia drew a long breath,

cudgeling her brains, then burst out, "We must think of something new to do now, Polly, since the garden party is over."

"I know," said Polly. "How I wish we could get up something else, for our fancy work is all done! Oh, wasn't it just gorgeous, Alexia"—with a comfortable little wriggle.

"I should say it was," cried Alexia, "and didn't it sell, though!—and everybody wished there was more, except my horrible old shawl."

"Why, Alexia Rhys!" Polly poked up her head where she had been nestling it on Alexia's shoulder. "You know Mrs. Sterling sent for the shawl and gave five dollars for it."

"Oh, that was because she knew it was so ugly that no one else would buy it," said Alexia composedly. "Well, I don't care, so long as it's sold. I was just tired to death of that old thing, Polly; I don't want to ever see another shawl."

"Well, we shan't have another fair in a long while, I suppose," said Polly, with a sigh, and laying her head down again.

"Not till next summer," said Alexia; "then, says I, for a garden party! You know your grandpapa said he'd give you another, just as nice a one, then."

"But that's a whole year," said Polly disconsolately; "heigh-ho, it's so very long to wait! Well, I suppose we must think of something else to do now."

"Just for us girls," said Alexia.

"I don't know," said Polly slowly, looking up at her; "we ought to let the boys come in."

"Oh, not those horrid boys," said Alexia impatiently; "they're forever hanging around, and I like, once in a while, to have something by ourselves."

"But it seems too bad to leave them out," said Polly soberly.

"Well, it would do them good to be left out sometimes," declared Alexia: "they're so high and mighty, I'd just dearly love to take them down, and say, 'Boys, you can't come into this.' She tossed her fluffy hair till the long, light braids flew out triumphantly.

"Why can't we have a cooking club?" suggested Polly, after a minute of hard thinking.

"Ugh!" Alexia twisted up her face. "Oh, that's horrid," she said, with another grimace. "Do you mean, learn to make things on the kitchen range?"

"Yes, and on the chafing-dish," said Polly,

flying up to sit straight. "Oh, it would be elegant, Alexia!" she cried, with glowing cheeks.

"Well, I can't learn," said Alexia, "so that's some small comfort, for I'm in a boarding-house, and I guess the cook here would fly in a fit to see me come into the kitchen."

"But you can come to our house and learn with me," said Polly, clasping her hands, "and we'll make perfectly splendid things; just think, Alexia."

"What things?" asked Alexia doubtfully.

"Oh, little biscuits," said Polly, going back in her mind to the delights of baking-day in the little brown house; "cunning little ones, you know; you can't think how perfectly elegant we used to make them, Alexia."

"Oh, you had everything elegant in your little brown house," said Alexia, twisting enviously in her corner. "Joel's never tired of telling of it. And to think I wasn't there! Oh, dear me! I wish you would talk about it."

"Well, you can try now to make some biscuits. I'll show you how," said Polly eagerly.

"And Polly—oh, goody!—now don't you see we won't have to ask the boys to join this? A cooking club—the very idea!" Alexia hopped

off from the sofa, and stood in front of Polly, clasping her hands.

"Why, yes we will," cried Polly, hopping off too, and speaking very decidedly; "the boys will like it just as much as we do."

"The boys like a cooking club!" screamed Alexia, standing quite still.

"Yes, indeed," said Polly. "Why, Jasper used to like our baking-days in the little brown house, you know he did, Alexia, like everything."

"Oh, dear! yes, I know," said Alexia reluctantly.

"And beside, even if they don't make things, why, they can come to our suppers, for we must of course get up some, of things we've learned to make. Oh, it will be *such* fun, Alexia!" Polly sighed and clasped her hands.

"And I'll learn to make your cunning little biscuits," declared Alexia suddenly, quite as if she had proposed the plan and pushed it along from the very beginning, "and do let's have a club supper soon," she begged.

"There's a carriage coming," announced little Mr. Filbert, from his chair in the corner.

"Oh, it's for me, I know," cried Polly, spring-

ing to the window. "Yes, Mamsie has sent for me, Alexia. I knew she would!"

"Oh, dear me!" grumbled Alexia, awfully disappointed and racing after her. "Why, you can't ever go in all this rain, Polly Pepper."

Polly burst out into a laugh. "Just look there." She pointed to the patches of light in the sky gradually growing bigger and brighter. "It doesn't rain a single drop! And, oh, Alexia, look, look—the rainbow!"

XXI OF MANY THINGS IN GENERAL

BUT the cooking club with all its delights wasn't started yet for many a day, for just as soon as Polly got home there was the whole story of the morning's adventures of Joel and Larry's accident, to fill all her time and thoughts.

And then Jack—why, of course, he must come in for a goodly share of notice, for Joel insisted on making him a hero, to be willing to come and tell Mr. King of his misdemeanor on the pond. And Doctor Fisher had said the arm was in a bad way, the trouble being increased by all the running about in the pelting storm that Jack had indulged in, and this made Joel nearly frantic. Dear me! there was no time to think of cooking clubs!

And then after luncheon came a little note from Mrs. Sterling, brought by no less a person than Mrs. Gibson herself, who, in her staid little black bonnet and gray dress and white apron, waited for Polly's answer.

"No, Miss, I'll not sit down, if you please, as my mistress expects me back at once."

"Dear Polly" (so the note ran), "will you run down this afternoon to talk over a little plan for the Comfort committee. I suppose the boys have told you about it. Bring Joel, too, for he couldn't come this morning when it was proposed. Your friend, Pamela Sterling."

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Polly, vastly pleased, and springing off. "Yes, I'll come, Mrs. Gibson, please tell her, and right away; that is, when I find Joel."

"I hope you'll be there soon," said Mrs. Gibson, the light of pleasure at Polly's first words dying down a bit when she saw that Joel was to be waited for. "Couldn't you come first?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, I must find Joel," said Polly, "but I almost know where he is, and we'll be over soon. Please tell her so."

She was already out in the hall, and Mrs. Gibson having obtained the best she was likely to receive, departed to carry back the word to her mistress. And Polly raced here and there without avail, for Joel was not so easily found after all.

"Oh, Joel, where *are* you?" cried Polly, racing along the hall. "Oh, dear me! Percy, is that you?" as Percy, with Van at his heels, came near running into her.

"Yes, it is," said Percy, coming to an abrupt stop, but Van ran past them. "Hold on, Van," he cried, his face growing very red, "that's not fair, when Polly wanted to speak to us."

"She didn't want to speak to me," said Van, making pretty quick time down the hall.

"Oh, Polly, make him stop," begged Percy, twitching her sleeve; "he's going up into Ben's room; it's not fair, for I was ahead."

"Well, you aren't ahead now," cried Van in glee, and mounting the stairs, he couldn't resist the temptation to peer over the railing. "Ha, ha! who's the smart one now? I'll get there first, Percy Whitney."

"You shan't. Oh, make him stop," howled Percy, in distress.

"Van," called Polly, looking up at him.

"What?" said Van, wishing he hadn't wasted the time in exhibiting his triumph. He still kept on.

"I want you," said Polly clearly. "Come down, Vanny, that's a good boy."

"What do you want me for?" asked Van, turning slowly to look down at her.

"Come down, and you'll see. Make haste, Van, for I'm in a dreadful hurry."

"What do you want me for?" repeated Van, begrudging every step of the way he was now taking, and keeping a sharp look out that Percy didn't spring past him. To prevent that, he spread out both arms. "Say, Polly, what do you want me for?" At last he was by her side.

"There, who's going to get up in Ben's room first?" said Percy complacently.

"Well, you aren't," said Van stoutly, "'cause just as soon as Polly's got through with me, I'm going to run like lightning up there—so! I was ahead when she called me back."

"Well, I was ahead first," declared Percy, "wasn't I, Polly—wasn't I?" he appealed anxiously to her.

"Yes," said Polly, "and hush, Van. Now, see here, boys: I've got to find Joel. Mrs. Sterling has sent for him to come with me over there this afternoon, and she wants us right away. Don't you know where he is? I've looked for him just everywhere." She clasped her hands and looked at them in despair.

"I don't," said Percy.

"Neither do I," said Van; "we're going up in Ben's room. Is that all, Polly?" and he prepared to run.

"No," said Polly, while Percy, in alarm lest a march should be stolen on him, sidled off on the other side.

"Van!" Polly nipped his jacket and held it fast. Seeing which, Percy concluded to remain, and he now came back quietly and stood quite still.

"Boys," said Polly, "it's just this way: you must help me to find Joel, for, unless you do, I'm sure I don't know what I can do. And Mrs. Sterling was going to tell us all about the Comfort committee to help Larry, you know." She dropped Van's jacket-end, and ran and sat down on one of the high-backed chairs, and folded her hands in dismay.

"Oh, we will—we will," cried both the boys, quite overcome at this, and, losing sight of all the charms that were awaiting them in Ben's room, they precipitated themselves upon her. "But where shall we look for him? You know he went out with Doctor Fisher in his gig. Say where shall we look for him, Polly."

"Joel went out with Papa Fisher!" cried Polly, hopping off from her chair. "Why didn't you say so before? Oh, dear me!"

"Well, you asked me where he was, and I didn't know where they were going," said Percy dismally, changing from one foot to the other in great distress.

"And they might have taken us; I think 'twas real mean," declared Van, in a dudgeon.

"Oh, Van, if he went with Papa Fisher, how could he? Oh, I know." Polly clapped her hands. "They've gone down to see that boy that got his arm hurt on the pond. I verily believe they have."

"Well, they might have taken us," said Van again. "I'd like to have seen him awfully, and now Joel will have him all to himself. I'm going to get something, and I won't let Joel have any of it," he added vindictively.

"Oh, Vanny!" and Polly went close to him, and put her cheek to his. "Just think what a dreadful time Joel had out there on the pond," and she gave a little shiver.

"Hah, hah!" ejaculated Percy. "You'd been scared to death, Van, if those boys even winked at you."

"I wouldn't, either," declared Van, straightening up.

"Percy—Percy," said Polly warningly, turning around at him.

"Well, he would," said Percy uneasily, not looking at her; "you know he would, Polly."

"Well, don't say any such thing," said Polly firmly, "and perhaps he wouldn't, either."

"No, I wouldn't," protested Van stoutly, since Polly reinforced him, "and you're just as mean as you can be, Percy Whitney, to say so."

"Boys"—Polly drew away from Van, and sank down on her chair again—"I shan't have anything to say to either of you when you say such dreadful things," and she folded her hands sorrowfully in her lap and looked straight ahead at the opposite wall.

"Oh, we won't—we won't," cried both boys, running over to her. "Polly, we won't"—shaking her arms.

"Well, don't, then," said Polly. "Now promise you won't do it again, or else I'm really not going to talk to you."

So Percy and Van promised, and pretty soon the wide hall resounded with merry peals of laughter.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Polly, jumping to her feet in dismay.

"What's the matter?" cried both boys, tumbling back in astonishment.

"Just look what I've done!" Polly was wringing her hands now, and presented a picture of distress.

"What—what, Polly?" They crowded up to her again.

"Why, I've forgotten I was to go at once to Mrs. Sterling's, and she's been waiting. If Joel comes, send—him—over." The last words came back in a little shout, for Polly was off.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Percy discontentedly, losing all thought of the attractions in Ben's room, "now Polly will be gone all the whole afternoon, I 'most know."

"Let's tag her," proposed Van cheerfully, not caring to get upstairs first, since Percy wasn't going to race with him, "I will; come on!"

"No, no," said Percy, in alarm, "she won't like that. Think of something else."

"I've thought of one thing, and you won't do it," said Van composedly, sitting down on the very chair Polly had left. "Now it's your turn."

"But it was no good—that old thing you

thought of," retorted Percy, in disdain; "no one could do it."

"I thought it out, anyway," repeated Van obstinately, "and you wouldn't do it, so I'm not going to think up anything else till you have thought something, Percy Whitney."

"Well, you needn't be so cross," said Percy sourly, and squaring up to his chair.

"I'm not cross," contradicted Van, looking up at him with a very red face.

"Yes, you are, just as cross as a snapping-turtle," said Percy, trying to think of the worst thing he had encountered, and quite pleased as he saw its effect on Van.

"You shall just take that back, Percy Whitney," declared Van, hopping out of his chair, and doubling up his small fists. "I'm not a snapping-turtle."

Percy edged off, with a sharp lookout for the fists.

"I didn't say so."

"Yes, you did," said Van crossly; "you said just that very thing, Percy Whitney, and I'm not a snapping-turtle."

"I said you were as cross as one," said Percy, wishing he hadn't been quite as free with his

comparisons, and moving off to a convenient corner.

"Well, that's just the same," said Van, advancing, "and Polly——"

At the mention of Polly, Percy stopped suddenly, drew a long breath, and never thought of the corner again.

"Why, we promised her," he gasped; "I forgot all about it."

Down went Van's little fist.

"So we did," he said gloomily, and both boys crept off together to the same corner Percy had selected for himself.

"Whatever shall we do now?" breathed Percy, quite lost in his dismal reflections.

"We stopped," said Van, as something to be offered with a grain of hope.

"But we did a lot before we stopped," said Percy. A deep gloom had settled over his countenance, and he wouldn't look at Van. "Oh, dear me!"

Van fidgeted about for a minute,

"Well, I don't know," he said, twisting his hands. "Oh, dear me! Why, you might say I'm not a snapping-turtle," he cried cheerfully at last, and fairly hugging Percy in his delight.

"So I might," said Percy, well pleased, "but I didn't say you *were* a snapping-turtle; I said you were as cross as a snapping-turtle."

"Well, you might say I'm not as cross as a snapping-turtle, then," said Van, determined to fix it some way.

So Percy said it, and then the two brothers plunged out of doors without a thought of the formalities of any plan. But it was Van who furnished it after all.

"Let's go down and see Candace," he said.

"Oh, yes, let's," cried Percy; then he stopped short and began to laugh.

"What's the matter?" Van twitched his sleeve.

"Nothing," said Percy, so relieved he hadn't said what was on the tip of his tongue; "you've done it after all and told something for us to do."

"Well, then, come on," cried Van, with a harder twitch. So they set off at a lively pace for the delights of Candace's little shop.

Meanwhile, Polly was sorrowfully confessing to Mrs. Sterling why she was late, and explaining all the reason that Joel couldn't accompany her. And the whole story of the morning affair on the pond, as gathered from Jack, for Joel

hadn't told a word of the encounter with the crowd of rough boys, had to be gone over with before Mrs. Sterling could open her budget of news and her wonderful plan for the Comfort committee.

She was just beginning on it.

"I do like that name so very much," sighed Polly. She was on a little cricket by the side of the lounge, her hands resting on the gay sofa-blanket.

"Don't you?" cried Mrs. Sterling, in great satisfaction. "It expresses so much, Polly. I am so very glad that you like it."

"Master Joel Pepper is coming down the street," said Gibson, guilty of interrupting, for she knew how anxious her mistress was to see Joel. "Shall I call him in?"

"Do, by all means," said Mrs. Sterling, while Polly cried:

"Oh, I am so glad!"

So Gibson knocked on the window, and beckoned to Joel that he was wanted; then she hurried down to the big front door to let him in.

There was a funny little noise over the stairs, as if there were more than one pair of feet, which was soon explained by Joel's bursting in, drag-

ging another boy after him, who had his arm done up in a sling.

"It's Jack," he said, by way of introduction.

"Oh, Joel!" cried Polly, springing to her feet, in consternation.

"Yes, and now what is it?" Joel advanced to the invalid's couch, ready for business.

"I'm very glad to see Jack," said Mrs. Sterling, with a smile, putting out her soft, white hand to the boy, who was gazing at the doorway through which he had come, as if nothing would please him so much as to go through it again, this time on the way back.

"You might get a chair, Joel, for your friend, and another for yourself," suggested Mrs. Sterling.

"I will—I will," cried Joel, well pleased to have something to do, and dragging up the first one he could find. "I'm going to sit on the carpet"—suiting the action to the words.

"Well, you see——" Mrs. Sterling, without more ado, began at once on her plan. Polly was by this time back on her cricket, very much relieved to find that it wasn't so very dreadful after all to have Jack there, since Mrs. Sterling seemed to like it. "There's nothing helps a boy who is

to be shut up in the house for a long time, quite so much as to have the other boys who can go out to play, think of him, and plan for his comfort. Isn't that so?" Mrs. Sterling looked at her little audience keenly.

"Yes," said two of them. Jack was so scared at finding himself where he had never supposed he could be—in the stately brownstone mansion —that he fixed his eyes on the carpet, not daring to move; as for speech, it was quite beyond him.

"Well, now that Lawrence Keep has gotten hurt, I think it will be a very good plan to have a Comfort committee to look out for him."

"What can we do for him?" cried Joel, very much excited, and jumping up from the carpet.

"Joel, do sit down," said Polly, quite ashamed, and pulling him by the jacket.

Joel very unwillingly slid back to his place on the carpet, and fastened his black eyes on Mrs. Sterling's face.

"Well, there are so many things to do for a boy who won't be very sick, but must be shut up in the house," said Mrs. Sterling, "that really it takes time even to think of them all."

"What are some of them?" burst out Joel, pulling the sofa-blanket in his eagerness.

"Joel—Joel," said Polly.

"Here are some of them," said Mrs. Sterling, "that I told the boys this morning when they were in here. You might cut out the funny things in the magazines and newspapers, the pictures and the stories, and send him. It's so nice to have little reminders to pass away the time."

"What else?"

"Well, I didn't tell them that, but there are letters you might write him."

"Ugh!" Joel made a wry face. "I don't like to write letters," he said bluntly.

"Joel," said Polly again.

"Perhaps that is the very reason it would be well for you to do it," said Mrs. Sterling, with a smile. "At any rate, it would please Lawrence, I think. Well, then there are conundrums; you can surely think up something of that sort that will amuse him, and puzzles."

Now, strange to say, Jack had a good head for these things, and without thinking where he was, he blurted out:

"I know a lot of 'em."

Joel whirled around on the carpet and stared at him, as did Polly from her cricket. But Mrs. Sterling only smiled.

"That's good," she said in approval, "now you see you can help us out a good deal"—nodding at him.

But Jack, with a wild glance at the door, as he came to himself, was beyond conundrums, as he thought of what he'd done.

"Tell some of 'em, Jack," cried Joel eagerly, emerging from his surprise. "What are they, Jack? Tell some."

"Not now," said Mrs. Sterling, interposing. "Jack is going to write them out, and they will be sent in as his contribution to Lawrence."

Sent in to Larry Keep's big house, almost as grand as the one Jack sat in now, by him, a little six-penny grocer's son, doing business over at the South End! He couldn't believe his ears, and to assist them, he lifted his eyes and stared at the person making the announcement. Evidently she meant it, and the more he gazed at her face, the better he liked it. But he didn't dare to stare long, so he concluded to transfer his attention from it to the carpet.

"We are getting on so well," said Mrs. Sterling, and her tone was very cheery, "that I am really quite hopeful that Lawrence may be amused by all that we are to do for him. And

now, before we go any further in our plan, suppose we take a little comfort ourselves." And she laughed a gay little laugh that wouldn't have sounded badly as Polly's own. "Gibson," she called.

Out came Gibson from the little room next.

"Will you bring us a tray of some of the nice things you always can get up, Gibson?" said her mistress. "I am really hungry, and I know these young people must be, they run about so."

"I am," declared Joel, in great satisfaction at hearing the tray mentioned, and bobbing his black hair, "awfully hungry."

"Oh, Joel!" said Polly.

"If you knew, Polly," said Mrs. Sterling, with a laugh, "what a pleasure it is to me, to hear a hungry boy say so up here, you would be very glad to let him. You can't think"—looking around on the three—"what good you are doing me. Really your work as a comfort committee has begun already."

XXII RACHEL'S VISIT TO MISS PARROTT

RACHEL ran blindly up the garret stairs of the parsonage and threw herself down on the top, her blue, checked apron over her head.

"Oh, I can't—I can't," she screamed.

"Rachel," the minister's wife called gently after her. But Rachel stormed on, "Oh, I can't; dear me, I can't!"

So Mrs. Henderson mounted the stairs and sat down on the top one, and took Rachel's hands, nervously beating together.

"My child, you must listen to me."

It was said very quietly; but Rachel knew by this time what the parsonage people meant when they said a thing, so she answered meekly in a muffled voice because of the apron over her head:

"Yes'm."

"Take down your apron," said Mrs. Henderson.

Down fell the apron, disclosing a face of so

much distress, that for a moment the heart of the parson's wife failed her, but it must be done.

"My child," she began very gently, "it is best that you should go to see Miss Parrott. She will be a good friend to you."

"I don't want no friends," said Rachel doggedly, in her distress relapsing into her old tenement-house disregard of the rules of speech; "no more 'n I've got here."

"Ah, child, that is not a wise way to talk," said Mrs. Henderson, shaking her head. "One cannot have too many friends."

"She'd be too many," said Rachel; "that old woman that came the other day in that carriage all full of bones."

"You must not talk so, dear. She is a very fine woman. Now, Rachel, she has asked to have you spend the day there, and we have promised that you shall go."

There was an awful pause. A big blue-bottle over in the corner under the rafters was making a final decision to explore the filmy lace web beneath the window where a fat old spider had been patiently waiting for him, and he gave his last buzz of freedom before he hopped in. This was all the sound that broke the silence. Rachel

held her breath, and fixed her black eyes at a point straight ahead, positively sure if she withdrew her gaze she would burst out crying.

"So you will be ready to go at ten o'clock, Rachel, for Miss Parrott will send for you then," Mrs. Henderson was saying. And in a minute more the parson's wife was going down the garret stairs; Rachel, with a heart full of woe, slowly following, leaving the big garret to the fat old spider, who was busily weaving her silken threads in glee over her prisoner.

And Rachel's woeful face was more than matched by the countenances of the two boys of the parson's family, who were not at all pleased that the companion sent to them by Mrs. Fisher, and who had turned out surprisingly just to their liking, should be suddenly torn away from them even for a single day. And they followed disapprovingly around, hanging upon all the preparations for the momentous visit, with a very bad influence upon Rachel's endeavor to control herself. Seeing which, their mother sent them off on an errand to Grandma Bascom.

So, when the ancient carriage, with its well-seasoned coachman who rejoiced in the name of Simmons, made its appearance, there was no one

to see Rachel off, save the parson's wife, the minister himself being away on a call to a sick parishioner.

Rachel went steadily down the walk between the box-borders, feeling her heart sink at each step. Mrs. Henderson, well in advance, was down at the roadside to help her in, with a last bit of good advice.

"Good-morning, Simmons," said the parson's wife pleasantly.

"Good-morning, Madam." Simmons touched his hat, and spoke with the air of state, for he kept his English ways. Secretly, the parson's wife was always quite impressed by them, and she looked at Rachel for some sign to that effect. But the child was scowling, and biting her thin lips, and she suffered Mrs. Henderson to assist her into the wide old vehicle without any further change of expression. When once in, she gazed around, then leaned forward on the slippery old green leather seat.

"Can't Peletiah come?" she gasped; "there's lots o' room."

"No," said Mrs. Henderson. "Now be a good girl"—all her fears returning as she saw Rachel's face.

Simmons starting up the horses, that, although an old pair, yet liked to set off with a flourish, the movement bounced Rachel violently against the back of her seat and knocked her bonnet over her face. This gave her something to think of, and changed her terror to a deep displeasure. When the drive was ended, therefore, and the brougham, after its progress through an avenue of fine old trees, was brought to a standstill before the ancestral mansion where Miss Parrott's father and grandfather had lived before her, the visitor was in no condition to enjoy the pleasures thrust upon her.

Miss Parrott, in the stiff, black silk gown that she had worn the day when she called at the parsonage, met her on the big stone steps. She put out a hand in a long, black lace mitt, "I am very glad to see you, child," she said, in old-time hospitality.

But no hospitality, old-time or any other, had a pleasant effect on Rachel. She gave a glance up and around the big, gloomy gray, stone house, with a wild thought of rushing down the avenue and home to the parsonage.

"It is a pleasant place, isn't it?" observed Miss Parrott with complacent memory of always

living in the grandest homestead for several counties.

"No, ma'am," said Rachel promptly.

Miss Parrott started, and gave a little gasp. Then, reflecting it was not in accordance with fine manners to notice any such slip on the part of guests, she led the way into the mansion. Simmons, much shocked, actually forgot himself so far as to scratch his head, as he drove off to the stables, and he didn't get over it all day.

"Perhaps you would like a little refreshment," suggested Miss Parrott, when, the child's bonnet off, she was seated on the edge of a stiff, high-backed chair. She couldn't think of anything else to say, and as she usually offered it to her friends at the end of their long drives when they called upon her, it seemed a happy thing to do now, especially as Rachel's black eyes were fastened upon her in a manner extremely uncomfortable for the person gazed at.

As Rachel didn't know in the least what "refreshment" meant, she stared on, without a word. And Miss Parrott, pulling with more vigor than was her wont, a long red worsted cord that hung down by the piano, a stately butler made his appearance quicker than usual, took

his directions from his mistress, and after regarding the small figure perched on one of the ancestral Parrott chairs with extreme disfavor, he silently withdrew.

Presently, in he came, his head well thrown back, and bearing a huge silver tray. On it were a decanter, two little queer-shaped glasses, and a plate of very thin seed cakes. He deposited this on a spindle-legged table, which he drew up in front of his mistress, and, with another glance, which he intended to be very withering, cast upon Rachel, but which she didn't see at all, he departed.

"Now, my dear," said Miss Parrott, in a lighter tone, feeling quite in her element while serving refreshments in such an elegant way, "you must be very hungry." She poured out a glassful from the decanter, and getting out of her chair, she took up the plate of seed cakes, and advanced to the small figure. "Here, child."

Rachel took the little queer-shaped glass, but had no sooner felt it within her hand, than she gave a loud scream.

"Take it away, it smells just like Gran"—pushing it from her.

It knocked against the plate of seed cakes Miss Parrott was proffering, and together they fell to the floor with a crash. In hurried the butler.

"I don't know what can be the matter," Miss Parrott was gasping, her hand on her heart, as she leaned against one of the ancient cabinets of which the apartment seemed to be full.

"It smells just like Gran," Rachel was repeating, with flashing eyes. "Oh, how dare you give it to me!" She was standing over the wreck of the priceless china and glass, which, as no such accidents had been recorded in the family, Miss Parrott had continued to use in the entertainment of her guests.

"You bad child, you!" exclaimed the butler, seizing her arm, and gone almost out of his senses at the sight of the ruin of such ancient treasures.

"I'm not bad," cried Rachel, turning on him and stamping her foot; "she's bad—that woman there—for giving me what smells just like Gran!"

"I can't make her out," declared the butler, eyeing her as he released her arm and stepped back toward his mistress.

"And that's what makes people drunk," went

on Rachel, pointing an angry finger at the wet spot where the liquid from the decanter was slowly oozing into the velvet carpet.

The butler turned an outraged countenance, on which a dull red was spreading, over to his mistress.

"You would better go out, Hooper," said Miss Parrott faintly, and holding fast to the cabinet.

"I'm afraid to leave you, madam," said Hooper; "she ain't fit—that creature"—pointing to Rachel, "to be here; she may fly at you. I'll put her out at once."

"You may leave the apartment, Hooper," said Miss Parrott, regaining some of her dignity by a mighty effort. "I'm not in the least afraid." But her looks belied her words, or at any rate the old serving-man thought so, and he made bold to remonstrate again.

"Let me put her out, madam," he begged. "I'll call the gardeners."

"Oh, no, no!" protested Miss Parrott, coming rapidly to her self-composure; "that would never do in all the world. Leave the room, Hooper." This last was said so exactly like his mistress at her best, that the butler obeyed it, making a wide circuit as he passed Rachel, who

still stood, the picture of wrath, over the broken china and glass.

Not a word was said for some minutes. Outside, Polly, the old parrot, was scolding vociferously, and the tall clock was ticking away for dear life. Hooper, his ear first, and then his eye, glued to the keyhole, was vainly endeavoring to find out what was passing in the sitting-room.

At last Rachel drew a long breath. "I'm sorry I broke your things," and she awkwardly pushed the bits with her shoe.

"Oh, that's no matter," said Miss Parrott, feeling astonished at herself for the words, "but you said such dreadful things. I can never forget that." She drew a long breath.

No matter that she broke those beautiful things! The whole truth flashed upon Rachel, and although the smell of the hated stuff was even yet dragging back to her all the memory of her low condition of life through such childhood as she had known, over and above it all was quickly rising the conviction that for this unpardonable misdemeanor she would be sent back to the city and—awful thought!—perhaps to Gran. She set her teeth together hard, and clenched her thin hands as they hung by her side.

"Yes. I say it is no matter," repeated Miss Parrott, not suffering herself to glance at the wreck of her ancestral treasures, "but oh, child! why did you say such dreadful things?" She still clung to the cabinet, shocked out of one tradition of her family, as if she must still hold to its time-worn and honored furnishings.

Rachel gave her a swift, bird-like glance. "You do care; you're crying," she exclaimed, aghast at the tears running over the wrinkled face.

"Not about that, but the things you said; I didn't mean to do you harm." Miss Parrott did not attempt to deny the tears, and brushed them off with a trembling hand.

"You ain't hurt me," cried Rachel, stumbling across the floor, with an awful feeling at her heart to see this stiff old woman cry.

"Oh, whatever your name is, don't! I'll go home, and the minister may send me back to Gran, an' she may beat me. Don't cry!" She seized the heavy black silk in its front breadth and held on tightly.

The butler, having at this minute his eye at the keyhole, now rushed in, unable to bear the sight, to be met by Miss Parrott, her withered face flaming behind her tears.

"Do you go directly out, Hooper, and remain away until you are called." He never knew how he got out; and this time the keyhole was unobstructed.

"Were you beaten, you poor little thing?" Was this Miss Parrott bending over Rachel's shaking shoulders, and hands clutching the silk gown! "Oh, dear, dear!"

"'Tain't no matter," mumbled Rachel. "I don't care, only don't let me go back." She shook in terror, and crouched down to the floor.

"Never!" said Miss Parrott firmly. All the blood in her body seemed to be in her wrinkled face, and her eyes shone, as had those of her father, the old judge, when befriending some poor unfortunate. "You shall never go back, child; don't be afraid."

But Rachel still shivered. There were the broken bits of china and glass on the floor back of her, and the minister and his wife must be told of the awful accident; and what they would do with her, why, of course, no one could tell.

The thin, wrinkled fingers on which blazed many rings, that had been her mother's before her, were tremblingly smoothing Rachel's neatly braided hair. And as if she thought what was

passing beneath them, Miss Parrott broke out quickly:

"I shall never speak of it—of the breaking of those articles, child; so no one will know it but ourselves."

"Never tell?" gasped Rachel, lifting her head, in astonishment and scarcely believing her ears.

"Of course not," declared Miss Parrott, in scorn. "So do not be afraid any longer, but get up and dry your eyes." For at this announcement, Rachel's tears had gushed out, and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

For answer Rachel flew to her feet, and without any warning and astonishing herself equally with the recipient, she threw her arms around Miss Parrott's thin neck, in among all the ancient laces with which she delighted to adorn it, and hugged it convulsively.

Taken unawares, Miss Parrott could utter no word, and Rachel clung to her and sobbed. But the old ears had heard what hadn't been sounded in them for many a long day, and forgotten were wasted heirlooms and broken treasures.

"I love you!" Rachel had said, hugging her tumultuously.

XXIII THE OLD PARROTT HOMESTEAD

"COME, child." Miss Parrott drew herself out of Rachel's clinging arms. What should she do now to divert this little girl from her terror and distress? She was sorely put to it for the answer. She gathered up the nervous hands in one of her own, and led the way out into the wide hall, hung with ancestral portraits. "I am going to take you to my own room," she said suddenly.

Rachel didn't know the wonderful condescension of this plan for her amusement, but she clung to the long, thin fingers, and presently she was seated on a cricket covered with tambour work, and watching Miss Parrott's movements about the spacious apartment.

"Move your cricket over here, child." Miss Parrott was unlocking what looked to Rachel's eyes like a big cupboard that stood out from the wall. It had little panes of glass all criss-

"I used to play with it." she said softly.

crossed with strips of white wood across its face, and a set of drawers beneath. And as Rachel obediently carried the cricket over and set it down where Miss Parrott indicated, her chief attention was still upon this curious cupboard, and what Miss Parrott was doing in it, for the door now stood open.

Rachel leaned forward on her cricket and rested her hands on her knees. On the shelves was such an array of articles, that to the child's gaze, nothing stood out distinctly as an object to lavish one's sole attention upon. But Miss Parrott made early choice, and lifting out a big doll from one of the lower shelves, she laid it in Rachel's lap.

"I used to play with it," she said softly.

Rachel looked down upon the doll in her lap. It was long and hard and angular as to body, and its face was a dull white, except some patches of pink on the outer edge of the cheeks, showing the rest of the coloring to have been worn away. Its eyes were staring up into Rachel's in such an expressionless, unpleasant manner that she involuntarily turned away her own.

"Her name is Priscilla," said Miss Parrott, looking down at Rachel, which called her to her-

self and the necessity of attention to these efforts to amuse her.

"Yes'm," said Rachel.

"Now I don't suppose you know how much I loved this doll," said Miss Parrott, turning her back on the cupboard, to draw up a chair opposite Rachel and seat herself upon it, "but I used to take her to bed with me nights."

"Did you?" said Rachel, beginning to finger the doll with sudden interest.

"Yes, and I made her clothes and talked to her, and sometimes I called her 'Sister,'" said Miss Parrott, quite gone in remembrance.

"Oh!" said Rachel.

"You see, she was all I had. I was the youngest, and my real sister was married and away, and my brothers were men when I was a little girl."

"Oh!" said Rachel again.

"And so I had to make believe that Priscilla was alive," said Miss Parrott, her eyes glowing with remembrance of her childhood, brought so singularly near on this morning; "I really had to, Rachel."

"I've got a child," said Rachel, growing suddenly communicative, and looking up from the

old doll to watch the effect of her announcement.

"Have you, dear?" responded Miss Parrott, quite pleased at the bright face, from which the last tear had been wiped away.

"Yes, my Phronsie gave her to me, and she sleeps with me," said Rachel, in great satisfaction.

"I suppose she is very much like Priscilla," observed Miss Parrott.

"Oh, no, she isn't," declared Rachel promptly, turning her mind again to the ancient doll; "my child is pretty and she shuts her eyes. She isn't a bit like yours."

"Well, Priscilla was always pretty to me," said Miss Parrott, astonished that she felt so little the slight to her child. "Well, now, Rachel, we will put the doll aside. You may lay it on the bed and then come back here."

Rachel got off from her cricket and went over to the other side of the apartment.

"My, what a funny bed!" she exclaimed, using her eyes to their utmost to see as much of the canopy, with its tester of blue and white chintz, the four posts beneath, and the counterpane executed in honeycomb pattern.

Miss Parrott, exploring her cupboard to get out something else with which to entertain Rachel, did not hear her; so she slowly returned, walking backward to observe as much of this queer article of furniture as the time allowed. In this way she fell over the cricket.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Parrott, pulling her head out of the cupboard, "did you hurt yourself, child?"

"No'm," said Rachel, getting up with a very red face, and exceedingly ashamed. "I don't believe I broke it." She set the cricket up in its proper position and anxiously examined it all over.

"Oh, no," said Miss Parrott reassuringly, "the cricket is not harmed. See here, Rachel"—she held in her hand a long string of little irregular things that dangled as she turned toward her—"I am going to put these on your neck. Now stand still, child." And suiting the action to the words, something snapped with a little click under Rachel's chin.

Rachel looked down quickly at the queer little odd-shaped red things, hanging over her breast.

"I used to wear them when I was a little girl,

very much smaller than you," said Miss Parrott, her head on one side and falling back to see the effect.

"What are they?" asked Rachel, not daring to lay a finger on them, and holding her breath at the idea of being within the magnificent circle of Miss Parrott's early adornments.

"Red coral beads," said Miss Parrott, smiling at the nice contrast between the necklace and the dark little face above. "Now, child, you are going to wear them whenever you come to visit me and as long as you stay. And that means they will not come off till to-morrow, for you are to sleep here to-night."

"I haven't any nightgown," said Rachel, who by this time liked to stay well enough, but seeing here an insuperable objection.

"That's easily managed," said Miss Parrott, quickly; "I shall send a note to the parsonage, saying you will stay, and——"

At the mention of "note" Rachel suddenly collapsed, and a look of terror spread over her face.

"Oh, I forgot," she cried.

"Why, what is the matter, child?" demanded Miss Parrott, in great concern.

"I must go and get it," said Rachel wildly, and, dashing blindly off, she left Miss Parrott standing in front of her ancestral cupboard holding her childish treasures, to rush over the long and winding back stairs. At their end she found herself hopelessly entangled in an array of back passages and little old-fashioned apartments, from which, run as she would, she could never seem to find the right exit.

Her progress was noted with indignation and contempt by as many of the old retainers in the Parrott service as could be gathered at short notice, and their calls to her to leave the premises, accompanied by sundry shakings of a long crash towel in the hands of the cook, only impeded Rachel's hope of success.

"I don't know the way out," she cried at last, finding herself in a big closet whose door, being open, she fondly trusted would allow her passage out into the free air.

"Well, 'tisn't here," said an angry voice, and the brandishing of a big, iron spoon made Rachel beat a hasty retreat, this time into the back hall. Miss Parrott was just descending the stairs, her stiff, black silk skirt held high, before she set foot in the servants' quarters.

"Child, child," she said in reproach, "what *is* the matter?"

"Oh, I've lost the note—I mean, I forgot it." Rachel flew to her and wailed it all out.

"She's crying, that bad girl is, all over Mistress's front breadth," announced Joanna, the parlor maid, through the little window of the butler's pantry.

"La me!" ejaculated the cook, raising her hands and the crash towel, "to think of our mistress so demeaning herself!"

"What note?" cried Miss Parrott, in great bewilderment. "Rachel, stop crying at once and speak plainly. What note do you mean?"

"The one Mrs. Henderson gave me," cried Rachel; "I must go and get it, but I don't know the way out."

"To give to me? Did Mrs. Henderson tell you to give it to me?" asked Miss Parrott, beginning to see light.

"Yes'm. Oh, please let me out," begged Rachel; "I left it in the carriage."

"Ah—well, then, we'll go out this way." And there, turning to the left, was the passage down which Rachel had plunged twice before, and at its end, a small green door, that, when

opened, led out through an arbor overrun with creepers, to a short cut to the stables.

"Now, then!" Miss Parrott gathered up the train of her black silk gown and put it over her arm; then in full view of the latticed window of the kitchen and scullery department, she sallied forth across the greensward to the stables beyond, Rachel's brown hand tucked in her own.

"Laws a me!" It was the scullery maid who screamed this out. "She's got on Miss Parrott's coral beads."

"You're a ninny!" cried the cook, turning on her in disdain; "go back to your pots and kettles, Ann. Whatever would she have to do with the Mistress's beads? It's some old string you see around her neck."

"It tell you it's Miss Parrott's red beads!" declared Ann stoutly. She might be sent back to her work among the pots and kettles, but she would stick fast to her tale. "I seen 'em when I went up to Miss Parrott's room with the bellows I'd cleaned this very morning, through the little winders to her cupboard, an' I'd know 'em anywhere."

The cook stamped her foot, shaking the crash towel which she still retained, and Ann withdrew

to those inner precincts that were considered her department.

Meanwhile, Miss Parrott was talking to Simmons, who, touching his hat respectfully when he saw her approach, now came up to await her commands.

"Have the goodness to open the brougham door, Simmons," said Miss Parrott, going through the carriage house to the corner where that ancient vehicle was stored.

Simmons obeyed wonderingly, with an eye askance at Rachel, by the other side of Miss Parrott, eagerly pressing forward.

"Now jump in," said Miss Parrott, but this command was not needed, for Rachel was already within the family coach and prowling around on the old green leather cushion and over the floor with both nervous hands.

"It isn't—oh, yes, it is!" and up she came, red and shining, to hold out a small, white envelope.

Miss Parrott leaned against the brougham, and broke the seal. Rachel, her whole heart in one glad thrill of joy, made little sign except to heave a deep sigh of relief that the note had been found. Simmons, seeing no excuse for lingering further, went back to one of the carriages to go

through the form of inspecting its exterior, while he still kept an eye employed in the direction of his mistress.

"Dear Miss Parrott" (so the note ran), "I really do not think it is wise to ask Rachel to remain over night. I will explain later. Another time, perhaps she may do so. Yours respectfully, Almira Henderson."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Parrott to herself, and, folding up the little note into many creases, she stood lost in thought. "Well, I suppose I must yield to the parson's wife, for she has some good reason. But the child shall stay next time."

Rachel, whose spirits had risen, since it was quite positive that the note was not lost, now seized Miss Parrott's hand and hopped and skipped by her side across the green grass on their return to the mansion. Simmons came out of his retirement, his chamois skin with which he had been ostensibly polishing up a carriage, still in his hand, to stand in the doorway to watch them.

"Well, I *am* surprised," he declared, quite slowly and impressively, as befitted a serving-man to an old genteel family.

"Oh, let's go in there," cried Rachel, catching sight of the tall hollyhocks behind a wicket gate and pulling at the long, slender fingers.

Miss Parrott hesitated.

"Well, just one peep," she said, "for it is near to luncheon time," and she pulled out the watch from her belt. But to Rachel "a peep" meant all the world, so she dropped the fingers and raced through the gateway, to get there first and thus make it last as long as possible.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, her little dark face aflame with delight, "it's the most beautiful place." Then she began to run up and down all the narrow paths marking the circles and hearts and diamonds in which the old-fashioned garden was laid out, and sniffing the fragrance as she ran.

Miss Parrott seated herself on a stone seat by the fountain in the center. Her delight was quite equal to Rachel's, and the thin, wrinkled face assumed a more peaceful expression than it had carried for many a day, so that when Hooper came to summon her to luncheon, he was fairly taken aback at its unwonted cheer.

"Rachel!" Miss Parrott's voice had a pleasant ring to it. Rachel came dancing along a

little curving path, the red coral beads flying up and down on her breast, her cheeks nearly as red. "Oh, it's perfectly beautiful here," she cried.

"Do you like it?" Miss Parrott's thin cheek glowed, too. It carried her back to the day when she as a child had been skipping in that old garden, and her heart gave a throb at the thought that there were perhaps in store for her many delights yet, through Rachel's enjoyment of the old-fashioned flowers and shrubs.

"But come, child," she brought herself up suddenly to say, with a little laugh; "Hooper has summoned us to luncheon, and we must obey."

"Do you have to obey a servant?" asked Rachel, coming out of her dance to fall into step by her side, and looking up with wide-open eyes.

"Always," said Miss Parrott most positively, "else they won't obey me, if I don't. It's system that makes everything comfortable, Rachel."

As Rachel knew nothing whatever about system, she followed silently, her small head full of the beautiful garden in which she had been rioting, and which—oh, joy!—Miss Parrott promised she should visit again, when the luncheon was over. And seated at the polished

mahogany table, she was so lost in thought that Miss Parrott, in state at the other end, was obliged to speak to her twice before she looked up.

"Finish your soup, child," said Miss Parrott.

Rachel hadn't even begun it, and she now seized the first thing upon which her hand rested, a heavy silver fork. Hooper, back of his mistress's chair, darted forward to put the right implement before her. But Rachel gave him a withering glance that stopped him half-way. "You don't need to come. I've got it"; and she held up her spoon triumphantly, and ever after, all through the meal, she seemed to view his necessary advances as so many affronts, intended to show up her lack of manners, and she exercised all her wits to keep him at bay. So that the old butler was glad when the meal was over.

But long before that time arrived, Rachel had leaned back in her tall, carved chair, letting her knife and fork rest on her plate, while she feasted her eyes over the table, what it held, and then around the whole apartment.

"There's some of the same flowers like the ones in the garden," she said, bringing her gaze

back to point to the old-fashioned silver vase and its nodding clusters in the center of the table. "What are they?"

"Those are larkspur," said Miss Parrott, craning her neck to see around the high silver service from which she poured her tea.

"And what's the other, this side?" Rachel bobbed over on her chair, till Hooper involuntarily closed his eyes, expecting she would go entirely off from her chair, and he didn't want to see it, it would be so disgraceful at a Parrott table.

"That?" Miss Parrott, too, leaned over on her chair. "Oh—why, that's a ragged robin, Rachel."

"*Ragged robin!*" repeated Rachel, hopping off from her chair. "Oh, I want to see it," and she ran around the table-end, and leaned over to get a better view. "'Tisn't a bit ragged," she cried, very much disappointed, "and besides, he isn't there."

"Oh, Rachel!" exclaimed Miss Parrott, in dismay. "You must not do so; we never leave our chairs when we are at the dining-table."

Rachel, thus admonished, scuttled back to her seat, while Hooper groaned and pretended not to

see anything. But she kept her black eyes fastened on the ragged robins. "There isn't any bird there," she said.

"What, child?"

"You said there was a robin in those flowers," said Rachel again, using her little brown fingers to designate the vase and its contents, "and that he was ragged, and there isn't any."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Miss Parrott; then she laughed. "The flowers are called ragged robins, Rachel," she said.

"Oh!" said Rachel; then she laughed, too, a merry little peal, that just bubbled over because she was happy.

"Now eat your luncheon," said Miss Parrott. "Hooper, you may give her some more milk."

"I don't want any more milk," said Rachel, waving him off with quite an air. "I've got lots and lots"—peering into her cup. She took up her knife and fork again, but, looking over them, found so many things to call for more attention than they seemed to be worthy of, that she soon laid them down again upon her plate.

"Where did you used to sit when you was a little girl?" she asked suddenly, when she had been reflecting a bit.

"I? Oh, I sat at the side of the table," said Miss Parrott, starting, as she was thus hastily summoned down into her past.

"Then can't I sit there now?" cried Rachel, flying out of her chair again. "Say, can't I? Do let me." She ran clear around the table and hung over Miss Parrott's chair.

Hooper groaned again and looked steadfastly out of the opposite window.

"My child," exclaimed Miss Parrott; her tone was very grave, but she put her long arm around Rachel and drew her closely to her, "remember what I said: you must not leave your chair during a meal."

"I forgot." Rachel flew back again, not waiting for her request to be granted, and sat down meekly in her place.

"And you must eat something," continued Miss Parrott, glancing at the little girl's plate, and with dreadful qualms at her old heart for having been severe. "If you don't, Rachel, Mrs. Henderson won't let you come here again."

The solemn butler folded and unfolded his hands, while his face expressed the belief that such a calamity could possibly be borne.

"And if you didn't come, Rachel"—Miss Par-

rott took up her cup of tea, and set it down again untouched—"I should feel very sorry; I should indeed," she added, with a little catch in her throat.

"So should I," said Rachel abruptly; then she picked up her knife and fork and began to eat as fast as she could.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Miss Parrott, quite horrified, "not so fast! Pray don't, Rachel"—looking down the table-length in distress.

Rachel by this time was alive to the disgrace she was undergoing, and she turned quite pale, and deserting her food altogether, sat stiff and straight on her chair, too miserable to care for anything. Miss Parrott bore this for a breathing-space, and then without a warning she slipped off from her chair and went quickly down to the end of the table.

"I'm not blaming you, you poor little thing," she declared, bending over the dark hair; "don't think so, Rachel."

Rachel turned with a swift movement and hid her face in the laces falling from Miss Parrott's breast.

"I want to go home to Mrs. Henderson's," she sobbed.

"We don't care for any more luncheon, Hooper," said Miss Parrott hoarsely, taking Rachel's hand. "We will go into the other room," and she led her off sobbing.

When Rachel reached Hooper, however, standing petrified with surprise, she looked up at him defiantly and brushed the tears from her cheek.

And after they had passed out, Hooper still stood in a daze. At last he came out of it, and, ejaculating, "Well, I never did!" he began to clear the table.

Once outside, Miss Parrott turned suddenly.

"We'll go back to the garden," she said.

This pleased Rachel very much, and she forgot her distress and mortification, and actually smiled up into the old face.

"Your hand's shaking," she announced, turning her gaze to the long, slender fingers covering her own little brown palm.

"Is it?" said Miss Parrott absently.

"Yes, it shakes dreadfully," said Rachel, with a critical air. "Look!"—pointing down at it.

"Oh, that is nothing," began Miss Parrott; then she stopped suddenly and put both hands on the thin little shoulders. "Oh, child," she said brokenly, "I did so hope you'd like me, for

I've nothing in this world to live for, Rachel, and now you want to go back to the parsonage."

"Oh, I don't want to go back—I do love you!" cried Rachel, in great alarm, and she raised her little brown hands and actually smoothed the long, wrinkled face between them. "Don't look so, you look dreadful," she pleaded.

For at the touch of those childish hands over her face, Miss Parrott broke utterly down, all her aristocratic traditions falling away in a second of time, to reveal her lonely, hopeless life. And she sobbed in a way very hard for any onlooker to hear. To Rachel, powerless to stop her, it seemed the most terrible thing in all this world, and she burst out in her misery:

"I'll stay here forever if you'll stop."

That word "forever" did what nothing else could have achieved. It brought Miss Parrott to herself. Then it was Rachel who led her about the old-fashioned garden, and chattered about the flowers, unmindful whether or no she was answered, until presently Miss Parrott was quite recovered, and even smiling in a well-pleased way. At last she pulled out her ancient watch from her belt.

"Now, Rachel," she said, "you must go back

to the parsonage this afternoon, for Mrs. Henderson expects you."

"I'll stay if you want me to," said Rachel, moving closer to Miss Parrott's side.

"No, dear—not to-day, because it wouldn't be right; the parson and his wife only loaned you to me for to-day, but——"

"What's 'loaned'?" interrupted Rachel abruptly, and wrinkling her forehead.

"Why, they only let me have you just for to-day," said Miss Parrott.

"Oh."

"And so you must go back, but I shall come for you again," and Miss Parrott turned a hungry glance down upon the dark little face at her side.

"I'll come," said Rachel, with a sociable nod.

"And, Rachel"—Miss Parrott drew her closer to her side—"you may keep the coral beads, dear. That shows you are really coming back to me to stay."

"For ever and always?" cried Rachel, patting the necklace lovingly with one hand. "Can I keep 'em just forever? Say, can I?"

"Yes, child"—Miss Parrott's old face smiled in delight at the compact—"they are yours to

keep all your life. And now," she added brightly, "I want you to come into the drawing-room, and——"

"What's 'drawing-room'?" demanded Rachel, who felt it was much better for all concerned in a conversation to understand things as they went along.

"Why, that is the parlor," answered Miss Parrott.

"Oh."

"I want to hear you sing, Rachel," cried Miss Parrott longingly. "I can hardly wait, come." She hurried the child along with hasty steps, Rachel skipping by her side.

"I'll sing," she said, "all you want me to. I know lots and lots of things"—until the grand piano in the long, dim drawing-room, not opened for many years, was reached. Then she spun down the middle of the apartment. "I'm going to dance first," she announced, picking out the skirt of her gown on either side. "My, but ain't it dark, here, though!"

XXIV RACHEL'S FUTURE

WHEN the old brougham drew up in front of the colonial door, Miss Parrott let her hands fall away from the time-stained piano-keys.

"It can't surely be time for you to go, Rachel."

Then she did a thing she could not remember doing in all her life, she deliberately went on with her employment, allowing Simmons to wait on his carriage box, while she broke up the system of years that always made her punctual to a minute.

"You may sing that over again, Rachel," she said, beginning on the strains of the opera that Rachel had gathered from the barrel-organ on the street corners.

"Then may I dance again?" begged Rachel. "Please—just once before I go."

"Yes," said Miss Parrott, sitting very straight, and giving all the graceful little quirks to the

slender fingers which her music-master, long since dead and buried, had taught her. "Now begin, child."

So up and down, high and clear, rang Rachel's voice, with no more effort than the birds outside put forth, the sound penetrating the ancient walls, and paralyzing every domestic, while it nearly made Simmons, outside, fall from his box.

"She hain't touched that pianner in ten years," said the cook, in a hushed voice. "Oh, me! I'm afraid she's going to die," and she flung her apron over her head.

"Die!" exclaimed Hooper, finding his voice. "She won't die with that young one here," he added, in scorn.

"Now may I dance?" pleaded Rachel, plucking Miss Parrott's sleeve. "Do let me; you said I might."

"Yes," said Miss Parrott, wrenching herself away from the operatic strains, to begin on a little old-fashioned jig.

"Oh, that's so funny," giggled Rachel, hopping aimlessly in the center of the big drawing-room and trying to keep time. "Do stop; you put me all out."

"But that is a dancing-tune," said Miss Par-

rott, jingling away, "and sister and I used to dance quite prettily to it, I remember."

"Well, I can't," said Rachel, hopping wildly, and doing her best to get into step. "Oh, dear!" she brought up suddenly, flushed and panting.

"What is the matter, Rachel?" Miss Parrott let her hands rest on the yellow ivory keys and looked over her shoulder at her.

"Oh, I can't dance," said Rachel, "when you play so funnily. It doesn't go like that; it goes so." She picked up her gown again, and made a sweep off in one direction, and then in another, her feet scarcely touching the pictured roses and lilies with which the velvet carpet was strewn, all the while singing a tune that seemed to carry her off on its own melody. Miss Parrott turned around on the music-stool, and watched her breathlessly.

It was therefore much later than the parsonage people expected when the old brougham set Rachel down at their gate, and she walked into the house, supported on either side by Peletiah and Ezekiel, who had been watching there a full hour for her arrival.

"I like her," she said, marching up to the min-

ister's wife. "She gave me these"—putting her hand on the red coral beads on her neck—"and I'm going back again—to-morrow, I guess."

But it wasn't to stay, that Rachel went back on the morrow; it was only for a day. Despite all the pleadings made by Miss Parrott, and all the desire of the parson and his wife to please their honored parishioner, and most of all, the earnest wish to consent to what would probably be for the child's best good, they held firmly to the first statement, that nothing could be arranged till Mrs. Fisher and Mr. King had been consulted.

"They have sent the child here to us, and here she must stay until they make some other arrangement," they said firmly, and no amount of urging could make them say anything else.

So letters had to fly back and forth from the parsonage and the King estate in the big city, and Miss Parrott wrote long letters in a pinched, lady-like hand in very faint ink, crossing the paper whenever she was afraid she hadn't said enough to plead her cause successfully. Which condition of mind she was in perpetually, all through these writing days. These letters old

Mr. King endeavored to read at the first, but he soon threw them down impatiently.

"The child shall never go to a woman who has no more sense," he loudly declared.

Then Polly or Jasper would hurry in and wade through the missives. And when he saw the hungry longing of the desolate soul, and the sweet refinement of the writer came out, and the sterling honesty was revealed in the prim sentences, he relented and went tumultuously over to the other side.

"Yes, yes, she shall go," he declared, pulling out his big handkerchief to blow his nose violently, to remove all suspicion that anything was the matter with his eyes; "'twould be the best thing in the world for her. Of course she must go."

And so it was finally settled that Rachel was to live at Miss Parrott's and be her own little girl, going down to the parsonage every day to learn her lessons under Mr. Henderson's care, until the time when she would be ready to be sent to such a school as Miss Parrott might select should arrive.

"And she must come and see me sometimes," said Phronsie when the announcement was made

in the King household. "My little girl may come, can't she, Grandpapa?" she begged.

"Yes, yes, child," said old Mr. King warmly; "we all shall want to see Rachel now and then."

The Comfort committee being well-established and in fine running order by this time, Mrs. Sterling gathering them around her sofa, in her spacious sitting-room upstairs, Polly and Alexia saw no reason why they shouldn't begin work on the Cooking Club, "because," said Polly, "if we are really going to learn how to cook things, why, we ought to begin." And the mothers of the several boys and girls who were to form it, taking instantly to the idea, the two girls and Jasper set to work to write the notices of the first meeting.

"We ought to have another boy," said Jasper, "on the Committee."

Alexia wrinkled up her face. "Oh, don't; boys are so tiresome," she said.

"Why, I am a boy," said Jasper, bursting into a laugh.

"Oh, well, you are different," said Alexia; "we always expect you around."

"Thank you," said Jasper, with a low bow;

"I'm sure I ought to feel very much complimented, Alexia," and he laughed again.

"Well, I'm sure boys are such nuisances," said Alexia, leaning her long arms on the table (they were in the library at Mr. King's), "and besides they won't want to come to our Cooking Club, I verily believe, so what's the use of having them on the Committee?"

"Oh, yes, they will," declared Jasper eagerly; "you don't know anything about it, if you say that. Why, Clare, and Pickering, and ever so many more are just wild to be asked."

"Oh, well, then if we've got to have some boy on the Committee," said Alexia, accepting the situation, "let's ask Pickering Dodge."

"I'd rather have Pick," said Jasper in a tone of great satisfaction; and Polly saying the same thing, it was decided then and there.

"Well, now that matter is off our hands," said Alexia, "let's get to writing these old notices," and her hands began to bustle about among the little pile of paper and envelopes.

"Hold on," said Jasper; "if Pick is to be on this committee, he must help us with these things; and he'll want to, for it will be great fun."

"O bother!" exclaimed Alexia, jerking back her chair, "now we've got to wait. You see for yourself what a nuisance it is to try to get you boys in, Jasper."

"Oh, I'll get Pick over here in a jiffy," declared Jasper, plunging out of the library; "you won't have to wait long for us, Alexia."

It wasn't more than ten minutes by the clock, when in rushed the two boys and swarmed around the big table.

"Well, I declare," cried Alexia, looking up admiringly from a receipt book which Mrs. Fisher had loaned them, and over which the heads of the two girls were bent, "if you boys haven't been quick, though!"

"Haven't we?" cried Jasper, and his eyes twinkled.

"Don't tell," whispered Pickering over his shoulder.

"And what are you two whispering about?" cried Alexia, deserting the cook-book: "Now, tell us," she demanded, dreadfully afraid she would miss some news.

"Well, you see——" began Jasper.

"Hush—hush!" said Pickering.

"Now don't pay any attention to Pickering,"

said Alexia, turning a cold shoulder to the last-mentioned individual; "do tell us, Jasper, what is it?"

"The fact is," said Jasper, laughing, "I didn't have to go for Pickering at all; that is, only to the corner. He was coming here."

"And Jasper nearly knocked the breath out of me," finished Pickering, "he bolted into me so."

"Well, you were on the wrong side of the pavement," retorted Jasper.

"Is that all?" cried Alexia, horribly disappointed to get no news. "Oh, dear me! Well, do sit down, now you have come, and let us get to these horrible old notices."

So the boys drew up their chairs, and Polly pushed the cook-book, with an affectionate little pat, into the center of the table. "That's what we are going to study," she said gleefully.

"Study?" echoed Pickering, with a very long face. "I didn't come over here to study; I get enough of that at school," and he glared in a very injured way at Jasper.

"Don't get upset," said Jasper, patting him on the back; "you'll like this, Pick, I tell you."

"And it's a cook-book," said Polly, laughing merrily.

"All right," said Pickering, immensely relieved, and, reaching out his long arm, he seized it, and whirled the leaves. "'Lemon pie'—that sounds good. 'How to cook cabbage'—oh, dear me!"

"See here now"—Jasper seized the book and shut it up with a bang—"no one is going to look into that, until we write these notices. Why, we haven't even got a Cooking Club yet."

"Give it back," roared Pickering after him, as Jasper hopped out of his chair, carrying the book.

"No, sir," cried Jasper, bearing off the book out of the room. "There, you'll never find that," he observed, coming back to slip into his seat with satisfaction.

"Well, now," said Alexia sweetly, "if you two boys are through scrapping, we'll begin on these notices." She picked an envelope off from the pile. "Oh, dear me! who is the first one to ask?"

"I think Larry ought to have it," said Polly.

"Oh, Polly Pepper!" exclaimed Alexia, "Larry can't come for ever so long, with his collar bone all smashed and his leg hurt. The very idea!"

Polly gave a little shiver. "Well, he would like to be asked," she said.

"And I think so, too," declared Jasper; "a chap would enjoy it twice as much to get an invitation when he was abed and couldn't come."

"Well, that's nice to say," cried Alexia, bursting into a loud laugh, in which Pickering joined. "You've done it now," he said, clapping Jasper on the back. "I'm glad of it, old chap, after the way you acted about that old cook-book."

"So I have," said Jasper grimly. Then he laughed as hard as the others. "Well, you know what I mean, and we ought to give Larry the first attention."

"I'm going to write the notice to him," declared Alexia, dipping her pen in the ink-well and beginning with a flourish. But she threw it down before she had finished his first name. "Polly, you ought to write the first notice," she cried; "you proposed the Club."

"That's no matter," said Polly, "so long as we are going to have the Club. Go ahead, Alexia."

"No, I'm not going to," said Alexia obstinately, and leaning back in her chair; "you've just got to do it, Polly, so there!"

"There'll be no peace, Polly, for any of us until you do," said Pickering, thrusting his hands lazily into his pockets.

"And I think people would do better to go to work and help," said Alexia decidedly, "than to set other people against—oh, dear me!" as she found herself hopelessly entangled.

"You would do better to get yourself out of that sentence, Alexia," laughed Jasper, "before you do anything else."

"Well, I don't care," said Alexia, joining in the general laugh; "it's too mean for anything, Pickering, to say I fight, when everybody knows I suffer just everything before I say a word."

"Oh, dear me!" cried Pickering faintly.

"And when you two stop sparring," said Jasper, "perhaps we can do some work. Come now, Polly and I don't propose to do the whole."

Alexia, at this, scrabbled up another envelope, and began to write as fast as she could. And Pickering selecting a pen and getting down to business, the room began to assume a very work-like aspect.

"Now that's done," said Alexia, tossing aside the envelope. "I've addressed notice number two."

"Whose is it?" asked Pickering, glancing up from his own to the scrawling characters where the envelope lay face uppermost on the table. "Who is number two, Alexia?"

"You mustn't see," cried Alexia, twitching it away; "you go on and address your own, Pickering, and let mine alone."

"Well, I've seen already," said Pickering coolly. "It would be impossible not to read your writing a mile off, Alexia."

"Well, that's much better than to write such mean, lazy little words that nobody can make them out," she retorted.

"Oh, dear! we haven't a pattern of the notice made yet," said Polly, leaning back in her chair, after the labor of getting the first envelope addressed; and she pushed up the little brown rings of hair from her brow, for Polly didn't like very well to write, and it always took her some time to achieve anything in that line. "Jasper, you draw up one, do," she begged.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Jasper, aghast, "I can't, Polly; you can do it much better."

"Misery me!" exclaimed Polly, "I couldn't do it in all this world," and she looked so distressed that Jasper hastened to say:

"Come along then, Pick, and help me out, and I'll try."

But Pickering protesting that he didn't know any more how to write such a notice than Prince lying on the rug before the fire, Jasper in despair drew up a sheet of paper, and wrote in big staring letters and with a great flourish, clear across the top of the page:

"ATTENTION."

"Goodness me!" cried Pickering, his pale eyes following Jasper's pen, "it looks like a fire-alarm summons."

"Or just like Miss Salisbury when she's going to say something quite ugly and horrid," said Alexia, with a grimace.

"Oh, Alexia!" said Polly.

"Well, it does," said Alexia; "you know for yourself, Polly, she always stands up quite stiff on the platform and says, 'Attention, young ladies!' Oh, I quite hate the word, because we all have to look at her."

"Well, it does good service then," said Jasper coolly, "since it makes you do the very thing wanted."

"And we wouldn't mind looking at her," said Alexia, running on with her reminiscences, "if

she didn't make us do every single thing she says."

"That's too bad," said Jasper, with a laugh, and flourishing away on the second line of the notice.

"You needn't laugh," said Alexia grimly; "I guess you wouldn't if you had our Miss Salisbury at your school, Jasper King."

"Is she any worse than our Mr. Fraser?" said Jasper. "I wonder. I tell you what, Alexia, he keeps us boys at it! Doesn't he, Pick?"

"Well, I rather guess," said Pickering concisely, but his look told volumes.

"Oh, you boys have an easy enough time," said Alexia, with a sniff, "and you are always grumbling about how hard it is, while I don't say a word, but just bear things."

"I'm so sorry for poor Miss Salisbury," observed Pickering, lazily watching Jasper's efforts.

"Well, you needn't be," retorted Alexia; "she's very fond of me, Miss Salisbury is, and I don't in the least know what she'd do if I left her school. But I never shall go away, for I just dote on her."

"It looks like it," said Pickering, with a laugh.

"Well, I do," declared Alexia; "she's my very sweetest friend, except Polly Pepper, so there!"

"Oh, dear me! I don't know what next to say," cried Jasper, holding off the notice at arm's length, and scowling at it dreadfully.

"You ought to see your face, Jasper," cried Alexia. "Dear me! it's positively awful."

"Well, it's not half as bad as I feel," said Jasper, "with this terrible old notice weighing me down."

"'Attention'," drawled Pickering, reading the two lines. "'You are requested to appear——'"

"Hold on!" cried Jasper, turning over the notice. "Who told you to read it out, pray tell?"

"I'm on the Committee, I'd have you know," said Pickering coolly.

"Well, we'll pitch you out," said Jasper, "neck and heels, if you don't take care. Well, but really this is awful work." He whirled over the notice again, and glared at it savagely.

"Why don't we just say, 'A Cooking Club is to be formed'?" proposed Polly, "and——"

"Oh, that will be elegant," interrupted Alexia, clapping her hands. "Oh, Polly, you write it."

"Oh, I couldn't," said Polly, drawing back.

"Yes, Polly, do," begged Jasper.

"Oh, no, you write it," said Polly.

"Well, then, you tell me what to say," said Jasper, laughing.

"She did," said Alexia impatiently. "'A Cooking Club is to be formed'—didn't you hear her?"

"I have that," said Jasper, scribbling away on a fresh piece of paper. "Now what next?"

"Go on, Polly," said Alexia.

"Well—oh, 'Will you please come to the first meeting?'"

"'And see how you like it,'" finished Alexia; "that's just elegant—do write it down, Jasper."

"You may be sure I will," cried Jasper, vastly pleased that he was to be helped out, and finishing it all up with great energy. "Well, what else?" and he poised his pen in air and looked at Polly.

"Why, isn't that enough?" said Polly, a little pucker beginning to come on her forehead.

"I should think so," said Pickering; "it tells all the story."

"And they will come, you may be sure," said Jasper, holding off the notice again, this time for everybody's inspection, "and that's the main thing."

"And now we can all begin to write them," said Alexia, in great satisfaction, seizing her pen, which she had dropped. "Do put it in the middle of the table, Jasper, where we can all see."

"Wait till I write a good one," said Jasper, beginning on a fresh sheet of paper. "I was hurrying so to get it all down; you can hardly read it." So he wrote it out in his best hand, then propped the notice up against the book-rack. "Now begin," he said.

"Let's race," cried Alexia, already scrawling the first words at a great rate.

"Oh, dear me! we shan't do it decently then," said Polly, in alarm. "I mean, I shan't, if we race."

"Nor I, either," said Jasper.

"Well, I'm not going to race, anyway," declared Pickering, making slow, lazy strokes with his pen; "it's quite bad enough to have to write these odious things, without breaking one's neck over them."

"Well, don't let's talk," said Alexia, seeing that she couldn't have any part in the conversation since all her mind had to go into her task. "Oh, dear me! I left out the dot to my 'i,' and misery!

there's a blot! It was all because I was listening to you, Pickering Dodge."

"Well, we'll all be as still as mice now," said Polly; so no sound was heard save the scratching of pens over the paper, as the work went gayly on.

"Oh, isn't it too bad that we can't any of us find that ten-dollar bill Joel lost at the garden party?" broke out Alexia, when this sort of thing had proceeded for some time.

"Ugh!" cried Polly, and her pen slipped, making an awful scratch and just spoiling the best notice she had written.

Jasper raised his head and cast a warning glance over the table at Alexia, but it was too late.

"I do believe we shall find it some time," said Polly, scraping away with the ink-eraser and only making matters worse.

"Take care, Polly; the ink is too fresh," warned Jasper. "Wait until it dries."

"Well, I've smeared it all up now," said Polly, leaning back in her chair and viewing her work with despair.

"Perhaps it can be fixed," said Alexia, overwhelmed with distress and leaning forward to

see the worst. "I 'most know it can; let me try, Polly."

"No, no, Alexia, I wouldn't," said Jasper; "it's quite bad enough already."

"Well, maybe I can do it," persisted Alexia, "if I could only try."

"You may try," said Polly, pushing the paper toward her, when she saw Alexia's face, "but it's no matter anyway, I'll write another." And she had already begun it when Alexia threw down the ink-eraser.

"It's no sort of use," she said, "and I've made a shocking hole in the paper. Oh, dear me!" and she looked so utterly miserable that Polly's brow cleared and she began to laugh.

"Dear me!" she said, "it isn't a bit of matter, and see, I've ever so much done already on this. And I do believe we shall find that ten-dollar note sometime. I do verily believe so, Alexia."

"So do I," cried Jasper heartily.

Pickering said nothing; he didn't really believe the ten-dollar bill would ever be found, having helped Jasper to ransack so many possible and impossible places, but he wasn't going to say so, and thus add to the general gloom.

"And I think it was awfully nice of Joel to

do that dreadful work over Mr. King's old books, and earn the money," said Alexia.

Polly looked up with a smile. "Wasn't it?" she cried radiantly.

"And Father says Joe does the lists so well," said Jasper heartily; "he sticks at it every day like a leech, and there can't anything get him off to play till the hour is over."

"Well, I don't see how he can," said Alexia, drawing a long breath. "Dear me, it would just tire me to death. Why, Polly Pepper!" Alexia threw down her pen and stared at her. "When is the first meeting to be?"

"Why, you know," said Polly, writing away, laboriously; "next Wednesday evening, of course."

"Well, we don't say so," said Alexia. "How in the world are they to know?"

The other members of the Committee stopped work immediately and glanced ruefully at the little pile of notices accumulating in the middle of the table.

"We can never write those all over," began Polly tragically.

Pickering put out a long hand and picked out from the pile the one he had written.

"I shall just write, 'Wednesday evening, July 21st,' down in one corner," he said.

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Alexia, her face brightening; "I shall do mine so"—pulling out her scrawls from the heap of notices.

"But we don't tell *where* the meeting is to be," said Jasper after they had all fallen to work again.

At this second fright no one seemed to be able to speak. It was Alexia who first found her voice.

"Why not put it in the other corner?" she said.

"And that just balances," said Jasper, holding one of his notices up when the two additions had been made, "so it really looks better than ever."

"But we mustn't make any more blunders," observed Pickering wisely, "for we haven't any extra corners to go to now."

"Oh, we aren't going to make any," declared Alexia, "and we will soon be through, thank goodness!"—as the pens set up lively work once more.

"I hope so." Polly gave a long sigh. "Oh, dear me! it wouldn't be one-half so hard to do cooking for the Club, as to write a single one of these things."

XXV JACK PARISH

"GRANDPAPA!" Joel came in with a shout, rushed around the room two or three times, and finally came up to the big writing-table, quite blown.

"Dear me!" exclaimed old Mr. King, laying down his pen, "have you really got through, Joe?"

"Grandpapa," said Joel, his black eyes shining, and bobbing over his head to get a good look into the old gentleman's face, "she's asked him, she really has!"

"Who?" asked Mr. King, very much puzzled.

"Mrs. Sterling," said Joel, in a tone of the greatest satisfaction. Then he began to dance again, snapping his brown fingers to keep time.

"When you come out of that war dance, Joel," said old Mr. King, leaning back in his big chair to laugh at him, "perhaps you'll have the goodness to tell me whom you are talking about all this time."

Joel stopped his mad career and ran up to the old gentleman's side.

"Why Jack Parish—I thought you knew, Grandpapa," he added reproachfully.

"I suppose I might have known if I'd stopped to consider that you've talked your Parish boy every day since the little affair on the pond," said Mr. King, still laughing. "Well, and so Mrs. Sterling has invited your friend, Joel, to some festivity, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes," said Joel, "she has"—his satisfaction returning—"it's a supper at her house, to-morrow night, Grandpapa." He leaned over to bring his brown cheek close to the one under the white hair. "Just think of that!"

"Whew!" ejaculated the old gentleman, "and she hasn't had company for ten years!"

"Well, she's going to have us, every single one in the Comfort committee," declared Joel decidedly, "and she asked Jack, most particularly; she did, Grandpapa—she really did. May I go down and tell him now? May I, Grandpapa?" he cried eagerly.

"Why, if your mother says so, I suppose——" began Mr. King.

"She says I may go, if you think best," cried

Joel, hanging to the arms of the big chair and having hard work to curb his impatience. "Oh, Grandpapa, please hurry and say yes."

Instead of complying with this demand, the old gentleman leaned back in his chair and steadily gazed into space while he revolved something in his mind. At last, when Joel thought he couldn't brook the delay another minute, Mr. King whirled suddenly around in his chair.

"I tell you what it is, Joel, you and I will go down to see your friend ourselves."

"Oh, Grandpapa!" Joel gave a leap, and seized Mr. King's arm with both hands. "Right away now?" he cried, with sparkling eyes.

"Right away now," declared old Mr. King, getting out of his chair; "that is, as soon as we can make ourselves presentable for our walk. Goodness me, Joe, what a whirlwind you are!" —bursting into another laugh.

Joel didn't care what he was called so long as he was really going to see Jack Parish and carry him the wonderful invitation, and all the way down to the little grocer's on Common Street he just bubbled over with happiness, till everybody who passed the two felt a glow at the heart at the merry comrades: and

many were the backward glances cast at the old, white-haired gentleman of stately mien, with a chubby-faced boy of the jolliest appearance hanging to his hand.

"Well, well, well, and so here we are." Old Mr. King looked up curiously at the little sign above the door—"Ichabod Parish, Grocer"—then down over the shop windows overrunning with canned goods, and, to finish up, an outside stall on which jostled and overcrowded each other every description of vegetable in the market, from a cabbage down. A fat, red-faced man with a big apron that had been white earlier in the day, came out of the shop and stood by the stall.

"Anything in our line to-day, sir?" he said. He had a little pad of paper in one hand and a pencil in the other.

"Well, yes," said old Mr. King, with a twinkle in his eye, for by this time he perceived some lines along the fat cheeks that showed very plainly the habit of smiles running up and down in them. "I've come for a boy, if you please."

"A boy?" said the fat, red-faced man, laughing, till the round cheeks were all wrinkled up. "Well, now, I take it, you're joking, sir."

"Oh, no, I'm not," said old Mr. King very

seriously, but the other man had been just as observing in his way, and had seen the twinkle in the keen eyes. So now he laughed some more and waited patiently for the joke to be explained.

"I take it you have a boy named Jack, hereabout," said Mr. King presently.

All the wrinkles dropped suddenly out of the fat, red cheeks. "He hain't done nothin' wrong, Jack hain't?" gasped the man.

"Oh, Grandpapa, tell him what we've come for," cried Joel, twitching Mr. King's hand, and quite aghast to see the suffering in Jack's father. "Do, please, Grandpapa."

Old Mr. King was rapidly exclaiming: "No, no; bless you, did you think I'd come at you in such a way? Why, this boy here"—thrusting Joel forward—"has got an invitation for him. Now, then Joel, my boy, speak up."

And Joel did speak up; and in a minute they were all there in the little shop, and the fat grocer was bustling around to work a chair out from behind the counter. But as the big store cat and several parcels were on it, it took a bit of time. Meanwhile, old Mr. King sat down upon a box of soap, while Joel hung over his shoulder.

A woman came in with a jug to be filled with

molasses, and a small girl for a box of matches. But the little grocer told them to wait, and after he had placed the chair and gotten Mr. King off from the soap-box and into it, he bustled to a door at the head of the shop.

"Ma," he cried, putting his head into the room to which it opened, "do you know where Jack is?"

"He's upstairs," said a voice, evidently "Ma's."

"Well, tell him to come down," said the fat grocer.

"All right, Ichabod."

"Jack's to home," announced the grocer, coming back with the air of imparting a piece of news, just as much as if every word had not been heard. "Well, now, Mis. Jones, I'll fill your jug." He took it from her and she settled herself comfortably, during the slow process, to watch the stately, white-haired figure in the chair to her heart's content; her example being followed by the small girl who had, of course, been obliged to wait for the box of matches.

A pair of feet could be heard coming through the room just mentioned.

"I don't know what your Pa wants you for,"

said a woman's voice; "most likely for an errand."

So Jack, free from his sling, for Doctor Fisher had found him surprisingly quick at recovery, bolted through the doorway, and into the shop, and without a bit of warning brought up against old Mr. Horatio King and Joel.

"Great Scott!" he cried, scared out of his usual shyness.

"Yes," said Joel, sociably bobbing his face into Jack's, "I've come to ask you to supper. Mrs. Sterling told me to, most particularly, you know."

"Dear me, Joe!" exclaimed old Mr. King, "do give it to him more slowly"; for Jack's head of light hair was wagging from one to the other of the visitors in great distress.

"I am," said Joel; "awful slow, Grandpapa."

"It doesn't look much like it," said the old gentleman, bursting into a laugh. The fat grocer over at the molasses barrel, looked across anxiously at the group, and for once in his life wished Mrs. Jones, although one of his best customers, anywhere but in his shop.

"Well, try again, Joel," said Mr. King. So Joel began once more, and before long, Jack

He stood in the middle of the little shop.

Parish understood fairly that Mrs. Sterling had actually invited him to supper on the following night with the Comfort committee, just as if he were not the son of Ichabod Parish, the little grocer on Common Street, but were one of the rich boys of Joel Pepper's set.

"Pa," he shouted (he wanted some one of his own family to help understand this puzzle), "do come here."

The fat grocer, hearing this cry, could stand it no longer trying to stamp out his curiosity; so deserting the molasses barrel and forgetting to turn the spigot, he bore off the jug.

"There, Mis. Jones, there you are"—depositing it with a thump on the counter, and waddled over to his son and the visitors.

When he comprehended the matter, as after an infinite deal of pains he did, his astonishment knew no bounds. It absolutely struck him speechless, and there he stood in the middle of the little shop, lost to the fact that he was a small grocer on an obscure street. He was the father of Jack, hitherto obliged to go with boys of the neighborhood, not of specially nice families, with manners and aims to match, now—oh, joy! —with a chance for something better, that might

reach to unknown heights. He might even become an alderman! The little grocer's breast heaved with delight, but even in that blissful moment, his first thought was of his wife.

"Won't your mother be proud, Jack!" he made out to utter.

"Your molasses is all runnin' out," proclaimed the small girl who was waiting for the box of matches.

And Jack springing to help his father, who bounded to the molasses barrel, old Mr. King and Joel took themselves off without any further embarrassment to the little grocer, who surely never could in all this world express his gratitude as he wanted to.

"Be at my house to-morrow afternoon, and we'll go over together," said Joel, with longing glances at the center of bustle around the molasses barrel.

"Oh, Grandpapa, how I do wish I could have staid and helped clean up!" Joel burst out, as they left the shop.

"Oh, my goodness, Joel!" exclaimed old Mr. King; "such a messy job! How can you!"

"It would have been such fun," mourned Joel, wishing he could have free access to just such

a small grocer's shop, and thinking that Jack was the luckiest fellow alive.

"When I grow up, I'm going to have a shop like that," he declared, after marching on in silence down the next block and surveying with favor all the surroundings of the narrow street.

"I thought you were going to sell tin, like your Mr. Biggs, of Badgertown," said Mr. King mischievously.

Joel hung his head. "I was, but I think a shop would be nicer after all; you can have everything in it, you know, Grandpapa."

"Even molasses," put in Mr. King. "Well, I wouldn't decide the matter just now, Joel, my boy—which you will be when you are grown up. There's plenty of time yet ahead of you"

Jack Parish, with his hair carefully oiled by his anxious mother, and his very best clothes on, a circumstance calculated to invest him with dread and rob him of every bit of comfort to begin with, presented himself at Mr. King's mansion on the next afternoon. His countenance was long, and he looked so worried that Joel, rushing out to meet him, involuntarily ejaculated, "Oh, dear me!" in dismay.

After regarding each other uncomfortably for

a minute, in which Jack began to wish himself, a thousand times, back in the little shop, Joel burst out, seizing his arm:

"Come up into my room—Dave's and mine," and over the stairs they went.

"Is this your room?" gasped Jack, forgetting his discomfort and staring all about.

"Yes, it is," said Joel; "Dave's and mine. See my tennis racket, Jack. Isn't it prime!"—darting over to pull it out of a corner.

"I should say it was," declared Jack, fingering it lovingly as Joel thrust it into his hand with a, "Do you play?"

"A little," said Jack. He did not think it necessary to add that he was the champion player of the Common Street team on the dingy little open space given up to goats and tenement-house children.

"That's good!" exclaimed Joel, with shining eyes, and clapping him on the back; "we'll have a bout together sometime. And here are my boxing-gloves." He seized them and struck an attitude. "Come on, Jack," he cried in huge delight.

So Jack did come on, and when he emerged, why, there were the fencing foils to try; and

when this was all over, and both boys sat down, flushed and panting, why, Jack's best Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes and his oiled hair didn't look so badly, to Joel's way of thinking.

David now ran in.

"It's time to get ready to go to Mrs. Sterling's supper," he said, with a nod to Jack.

"So it is," cried Joel, beginning to run here and there for his other shoes and clothes.

Jack turned away with a feeling that it wasn't good manners to be looking on, and glanced out of the window.

"Come over and look at our butterflies," cried Joel, running over to a cabinet against the wall, "they're just beauties."

"Oh, have you collected butterflies?" cried Jack, whirling around, greatly excited.

"Yes; Dave and I have," said Joel, "we have lots and lots."

It didn't take Jack long to be over in front of the cabinet, and pulling out its many drawers. So that he was lost to all the fuss of dressing that Joel and David were undergoing, and it wasn't till he had been clapped on the back most vigorously with a, "Wake up, old chap," that he realized that the dreaded time had arrived when he

must go out to his first company. Then a dreadful feeling came over him.

"Oh, I can't go," he declared, his face turning as red as a beet, and he stood still, perfectly miserable.

"Why, Mrs. Sterling expects you," began David.

Joel had no such gentle ways.

"Come along, you," he cried, hauling Jack away from the cabinet and hurrying him off downstairs. Then he began to chatter as hard as he could, saying the first things that came into his head, until the gray stone mansion was reached, and they were fast and safe within the door.

Joel drew a long breath and began to mount the stairs.

"Any boys here yet?" he asked, looking up at Gibson in the upper hall.

"Yes," said Gibson; "three boys have come."

Joel didn't wait to ask who they were; he left David to bring Jack along and raced in to speak to Mrs. Sterling and the members of the Comfort committee.

"I am very glad to see you, Joel." Mrs. Sterling beamed at him from her sofa, feeling quite

sure of the success of the first company she had given to the boys, now that Joel Pepper had come.

Joel gave her a bright little nod; then, remembering himself, he went over to her sofa and stuck out his little brown hand.

"I'm glad I've come," he said, bobbing at the same time in great satisfaction to the boys.

"Where is your friend, Joel?" asked Mrs. Sterling, in disappointment. "I surely thought you would bring him."

Joel glanced around in dismay, then pranced out into the hall. A scuffling noise struck upon his ear, and leaning over the banister, he saw David and Jack apparently hanging on to each other and whirling around in the hall below. He was down over the stairs in a flash.

"He says he must go home," said David, still holding fast to the edge of Jack's jacket, and looking up with a very pink face.

Jack looked thoroughly ashamed, but he still cast wild eyes at the big front door, as Joel considering whatever was to be done at all, should be done quickly, launched him upstairs, and before he had a moment to breathe freely, pushed him into the beautiful sitting-room above with a, "Here he is."

The room swam all around before Jack, as he went up to the sofa-edge, and Mrs. Sterling's soft, white hand took his hot, nervous one. He didn't know in the least what she said, or how she looked, as he couldn't raise his eyes, but he remembered afterward that her voice was sweet and low, and that somehow he wasn't so afraid after that, and then Joel dragged him into a knot of boys, for by this time several were pouring into the room. And in five minutes Jack felt as if he had known them all for years, and he quite forgot that this was the first time he had ever gone into company.

When the bustle of the arrival was over, and every member of the Comfort committee was present, Mrs. Sterling said:

"Now I think, Gibson, the first thing we should do is to have supper."

So Gibson went over and touched the electric button on the wall, and in came the butler and two maids bearing trays full—well, just crowded with all the good things a boy could desire to eat. And these having been placed on the big, mahogany table in the center of the room, usually filled with books and magazines, but which had been cleared for the purpose, each boy

was invited to come up and be helped to whatever he wanted, an invitation that wasn't long left unaccepted.

Joel, in his fear that Jack would somehow be left out in the cold, bent all his energies toward getting him something to eat. The consequence was, that he forgot all about waiting on Mrs. Sterling, and, glancing around after he had poked a plate of cold chicken and jelly into Jack's hand, he saw two or three of the boys—Frick and even little Porter Knapp—vying with each other to be the first to serve their hostess.

"Ugh!" cried Joel, seizing the first thing on the table that caught his eye. It proved to be the salt-cellar, and he rushed up and presented it with a flourish.

"Ho, ho!" exploded Frick, as the little knot of boys parted in the middle, "why we've only got her a napkin and a plate."

Joel glanced down ruefully at the salt-cellar in his hand, and was going to beat a retreat with it, quite crestfallen.

"Thank you, Joel; I shall want it pretty soon," said Mrs. Sterling, smiling into his red face. "There, we'll put it on the table"—for Mrs. Gibson had been busy drawing up a light stand

to the side of the sofa—" and will you bring me some cold chicken?"

"Me?" cried Joel, perfectly radiant, but scarcely believing that he could be meant, after his awkwardness.

"Yes, you," said Mrs. Sterling, laughing; "so hurry, and get it, Joel."

No need to tell him that. Joel sprang at the table again, bore off a plate of the desired delicacy, and a spoonful of currant jelly by its side, and flew back again.

"Is that right?" he asked anxiously, with a dreadful feeling that he ought to have asked her if she wanted brown or white meat.

"How did you know I am very fond of white meat, Joel?" asked Mrs. Sterling. "And above all things I like the wing."

"Do you?" cried Joel, in a transport. "Now what else?"

"Nothing now, and the next time, why, I must let Frick and some of the other boys help me," said Mrs. Sterling, "so run back and get something to eat yourself, Joel."

So Joel, with a mind to edge up to see how Jack was getting on, found to his amazement that he was laughing and talking with the last

boy with whom he would have supposed it to be possible—Curtis Park!

"Dear me!" exclaimed Joel to himself, tumbling back instinctively when he saw that he wasn't wanted, and he fell up against David.

"I couldn't help it," said Davie, who had been quite miserable since his ill success in getting Jack over the stairs after Joel. He was aimlessly crumbling up a biscuit on his plate, and eating nothing.

"Well, 'tisn't any matter," said Joel, "and he's here now, and having a good time; just hear him laugh," he added enviously.

"Is that Jack laughing?" asked David incredulously, poking his head around the intervening boys to see for himself.

"Yes, it is," said Joel, bobbing his head decidedly.

"Oh, well, then, it's all right," said David happily. So he ran off to fill his plate and go over in the corner to eat its contents with a group of boys of whom he was especially fond.

Joel, left alone, was feeling very dismal, when suddenly he looked over, and caught Jack's eye. Curtis Park was saying something very jolly—Joel knew it was, for he caught scraps of it, and

so did some of the other boys who pushed up to hear the rest. But Jack Parish evidently didn't listen, for his eye had been anxiously roving around the room, and just at that moment, they rested on Joel, and they lighted up so unmistakably that Joel sprang forward, a light in his own.

"Did you want me, Jack?"

"Yes," said Jack, "I did." The words were not much, but they seemed to satisfy Joel.

XXVI MR. HAMILTON DYCE A TRUE FRIEND

AND after every boy protested that he couldn't eat another bit, the butler and the two maids packed up the trays and carried them down again.

"Now, Comfort committee," said Mrs. Sterling, "all draw up here."

So the circle of chairs and crickets was made around the sofa, and the real business of the evening began. It was in the very commencement of things Joel noticed that every one of the members seemed to take a fancy to Jack.

Curtis Park leaned over from his chair. "I say, Frick, change places with me." Frick was next to the visitor, Joel, of course, being on his other side.

"No, you don't," said Frick, not over politely.

"Oh, that's mean," began Curtis, then he remembered where he was, and sat back in his chair, biting his pencil.

Frick straightened himself up with enjoyment. "You can take my pencil," he said to Jack magnanimously; "we all brought 'em, you know, she wanted us to."

Joel caught the last of this. "Oh, dear me!" he exclaimed, in remorse, "I forgot mine; and, Jack, I was going to bring one for you."

"He can take mine," said Frick, shoving a very stubby specimen into Jack's hand.

"Mine's better," said Curtis, reaching over a brand-new one, just sharpened to a fine point; "take mine, Jack, you much better."

Jack, not knowing how to refuse, took it. And the other boys, seeing Curtis Park come down from his high-flown notions enough to notice so conspicuously the new boy, all began to find ever so many things in him that were worthy of their attention. So, instead of Joel having to push him along, Jack became quite popular. The result was that Joel was left out in the cold.

"Now," said Mrs. Sterling brightly, after a little of this chat had been going on, and Gibson had shaken up her pillows, and raised her mistress into a more comfortable position, "you all know, of course, that Doctor Fisher reports Lawrence ready for a little amusement, if we

send it to him, for no one is allowed yet to see him."

"But we will be soon. Doctor Fisher told my father so yesterday," piped out Porter Knapp, sliding to the edge of his chair.

"I don't doubt it," said Mrs. Sterling, smiling at him, "but until that good time does come, why we who belong to the Comfort committee ought to set to work on something that will cheer him up. And as I believe work of that kind always gets along better when ever so many club together at it, why, I thought I'd ask you all to meet here, and we'd see what could be done this evening. Now what shall we do first?"

She looked all around the circle, but no one spoke. "Oh, dear me!" she said, and her face fell.

"I'd rather write out conundrums than anything else," said Curtis Park, seeing some answer was expected.

"Good!" Mrs. Sterling beamed on him. "Does any other boy have something to propose?"

"Puzzles," said Frick decidedly. "I'd a great deal rather have puzzles; conundrums are just horrid."

"Two things to choose from," and Mrs. Sterling laughed. Her spirits were rising now, and all the doubts she was beginning to feel overwhelming her as to the wisdom of inviting these boys in for the evening, fled at once.

"I think puzzles are just as horrid as conundrums," said Joel Pepper, beginning already to feel the prickles run up and down his legs, from sitting still so long, and wishing for nothing so much as a good scamper; "they're both as horrid as they can be."

"Oh, Joel!" exclaimed Mrs. Sterling, quite crestfallen.

"Well, propose something yourself, then, Joe," said his next neighbor, with a nudge.

"Oh, I can't," said Joel, quite horrified; "I don't know anything that we can write down."

Jack leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"The very thing!" cried Joel, slapping his knee. And, "Tell it yourself, Jack," in the next breath.

"Oh, no, no," protested Jack, shrinking as far back in his chair as he could, and getting very red in the face.

"I very much wish you would, Jack," said Mrs. Sterling. And she looked at him in such a

way, that Jack although he had wild thoughts of taking a flying leap out of his chair, and off to the small grocery shop, nevertheless stuck to it manfully and at last found his tongue.

"We might cut out pictures that spell the names of books," he said.

"Capital!" said Mrs. Sterling.

"Well, those are puzzles," said Frick.

"Well, not like the ones you meant," said Joel, leaning back of Jack to bestow a punch. "Do be still," he added furiously.

"But mine would be puzzles, anyway," declared Frick, unwilling to give up the point.

"Well, we'd much rather have these, anyway," said Curtis Park, projecting himself into as much of the circle as possible. "Who cares for your old puzzles, Frick?"

"Boys—boys," said Mrs. Sterling gently.

"Beg pardon," said Curtis. "But we really do want these that Jack has just proposed. Mrs. Sterling. At least I do, and I'd give up conundrums to have them; so please let us have these."

"How is it, Frick?" asked Mrs. Sterling. "Do you give up your puzzles in favor of our making Jack's pictures?"

Frick wriggled in his chair; he wanted his puzzles dreadfully, and he couldn't see, since he had proposed them first, why he shouldn't carry the day, but every boy was looking at him sharply, so he mumbled, "Yes."

It was Jack who settled it happily after all.

"Let's have one of his"—bobbing his head at Frick—"and a conundrum," and he looked over and smiled at Curtis, "then one of mine after that. Won't that do, ma'am?"

"Well, now, Jack, you've fixed it cleverly," said Mrs. Sterling, much relieved. "Get your pencils all ready while Gibson goes into my bedroom and brings out the pile of magazines, and we'll have such a lovely evening of work. You know you must each select pictures, and each write a puzzle, and each give a conundrum; then they must be read aloud and we will choose the very best ones to send. Now then"—as Gibson deposited her armful of magazines on the little stand, and laid several pairs of scissors on the top of the pile—"let us all set about it."

Then what a whirling of leaves and snipping of paper, because they all decided they would begin on Jack's first.

"Can't we have some mucilage?" asked Joel.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Sterling. "Gibson will you get——"

Boom, boom, clang, clang, clang! It was the fire-bell, loud and clear and strong. Down went all the scissors, and a whole litter of papers to the floor, and the magazines sprawled every way, as each boy sprang out of his chair.

"Gibson," said Mrs. Sterling faintly.

"Now, you boys," cried Gibson, hurrying in, her cap strings flying in her perturbation, "don't you know no better than to jump up like that?"

"Gibson—Gibson," said Mrs. Sterling reprovingly, but she laid her hand on her heart.

"It's a fire!" cried Joel, with very red cheeks, whirling around from the window where the mass of boys was pressed.

"Well, is that any reason why you should act so and scare the mistress to death?" said Gibson sharply.

"We didn't scare her," said Joel bluntly; "it was the fire."

"Well, we must go," declared little Porter Knapp, struggling out from the knot of boys, who, all bigger and stronger, were pinning him against the window most uncomfortably.

"Oh, he mustn't," Mrs. Sterling said, in alarm.

"His father wouldn't like it at all; he was to stay here until he was sent for."

"It's a fire!" exclaimed Porter, kicking dreadfully, and his face getting red, "and I *shall* go!"

The other boys, just on the edge of saying the same thing, now stood quite still. Every nerve was quivering to be off to the fire, which, from all appearances, must be a splendid one. The bells were clanging fast and furiously, hoarse cries were heard, as if raised from hundreds of throats, and now, to add to the general mêlée, an engine dashed around the corner. They could hear the mad plunge of the horses, the shouts of the people; and then off in the distance, yet approaching nearer each instant, was another and evidently a more powerful one, the horses at a mad gallop. It was too much for any boy to stand.

"You see we *must* go." Curtis Park went over to the sofa, and said this hoarsely. "He's a baby"—pointing to Porter—"and he's got to stay here, but we big boys must go."

Mrs. Sterling looked up, and her face grew white. "But your fathers wouldn't wish you to go, I am quite sure," she said.

Curtis turned away his face, but his teeth were set. "I'm going," he said briefly.

Jack Parish's head spun, and he clenched his hands. Why had he come to this sick woman's house! If he were only out in the free, open air, he'd go in a flash. His father let him run to fires, and it wouldn't be many minutes before he'd be in the thick of it. He'd make a break and run!

But how white she looked as she laid her head on the pillow. Like it or not, there he was in her house, an invited guest; and she'd been so kind to him and sent him the first invitation he'd ever had. He opened his hard fists and closed them tighter than ever. Curtis Park was now at the head of the stairs. Having decided, he was bolting off. Little Porter Knapp was engaged in kicking Gibson, who was detaining him by the end of his jacket, and screaming wrathfully and slapping her hands. The other boys, most of them making up their minds to follow Curtis, were watching proceedings.

Jack strode off to Curtis. "See here," he said, "we ought not to go, don't you know?"

Curtis turned on him in a towering passion. "You let me alone, you grocer's boy, you! What business is it of yours?"

"I may be a grocer's boy," said Jack, feeling

himself wonderfully cool, as the other's anger raged, "but I know something of good manners, p'raps, and we're scaring that lady to death."

Curtis Park was dreadfully proud of his manners, and he would have stopped there, but as it again occurred to him that this was the son of a grocer who was setting up to be an authority, he cried angrily:

"You're a great one to teach me manners," and he dashed down the stairs and was out of the house.

"I wish I'd stopped him," said Jack to himself. "Hello, here's the whole mob"—as all the boys except Joel and David, and of course Porter, now plunged out to do the same thing. "No, you don't." He squared up in front of the staircase. "Not one of you goes down there."

They brought up with a gasp. At that instant a cheery voice in the hall below rang out:

"Hello, boys; I knew you were to be here tonight. Don't you want to come with me to the fire?" It was Hamilton Dyce to whom the voice belonged.

And in five minutes Hamilton Dyce set forth, with Mrs. Sterling's complete approval; a string of boys in his wake, including little Porter, who

was parted from Gibson only on her hearing her mistress say, " Yes, indeed, he can go; but do look out for him."

Mr. Dyce nodded over to her couch. " Come on, you little rascal "—to Porter—" you stick close to me or——" he didn't finish the sentence.

Gibson, pale, and shaking in every limb, but seeing no reason to regret that she had hung on to little Porter's jacket, sank into a chair, and simply looked at her mistress.

" Nevertheless," said Mrs. Sterling, with a long breath, and beginning to smile, " I am very glad those boys were here to supper."

If her mistress could smile, it wasn't so very black and dreadful after all, and Gibson came enough out of her gloom to mutter, " But look at this room," and she waved her hands in despair.

" Oh, that's nothing," said Mrs. Sterling cheerfully, and then she laughed outright as she glanced around at the effects of the tumult. " Gibson, come here a minute."

The old serving-woman crept out of her chair, and went over to the sofa.

" Do you know "—Mrs. Sterling took her arm and pulled her gently down to a level with the

face on the pillow, and her soft eyes twinkled—"it really seems good to see such a muss for once in my life: you do keep me so immaculately fine, Gibson."

"Oh, mistress!" breathed Gibson, aghast.

"And to think I have had boys, actually young life here in this room." Mrs. Sterling raised herself suddenly to rest on one elbow.

"Mistress—mistress," implored the alarmed Gibson, with restraining hands, "you'll hurt yourself."

"No, I shan't," protested Mrs. Sterling, her eyes beaming, and going on resolutely, "and just to think of boys being here!"—she looked around the room with a sudden affection—"and liking it—for they did, Gibson, they surely did, until the fire started. Oh, it is perfectly beautiful!"

"Well, do lie back, mistress," begged Gibson, thumping up the pillows invitingly, "else those dreadful creatures will finish you entirely."

"Don't say so," cried Mrs. Sterling laughingly, "and I will be good," and she settled back comfortably into her accustomed place. "Yes, Gibson, I have my young folks now, the same as other people," she added proudly. "You needn't

try to fix up the room yet; you may finish the story you were reading to me last night."

She had to turn her face on the pillow, for the smile would come, at the picture of Gibson, the immaculate, sitting down calmly in the midst of the awful effects of the tumult that had so vexed her soul.

She had her young people, there was no manner of doubt after that. And though the exit from their evening's excitement was not again made to the clang of the fire-bell, all the subsequent visits held fun and jollity, and quiet enjoyment, and everything else that was delightful, mixed up together.

And the Comfort committee had so much pleasure out of the whole thing, that one evening little Porter looked up from his laborious pasting, whereby a joke from a funny paper was going down for the sick boy's amusement.

"I wish some one else would get hurt," he said abruptly, without stopping to think.

"Oh, you beggar!" It was Curtis Park who turned on him, though every boy had glanced up in surprise.

"We can't have such fun," said Porter, waving his sticky hands in both directions, "unless

they do," and he twisted uncomfortably in his chair, as he realized the effect of his words.

"Well, we must think of somebody else to help with our Comfort committee," said Mrs. Sterling from her sofa. "Don't worry, Porter, we won't let ourselves die out for want of work. Boys——" She looked at them suddenly, and raised herself on her elbow, Gibson over in her watchful corner trotting across in great apprehension.

"Mistress—mistress," she began.

"There are ever so many young people who are hurt and sick and distressed and are taken right out of life." She was gazing at them now with eyes that were large and dark and shining.

"But we don't know them," burst out Joel Pepper, for she seemed to expect somebody to answer.

"No, but they need you."

"Mistress—mistress," begged Gibson, hanging over her.

"And if you do the work after Lawrence doesn't need it, and he is here with us, well and happy once more, I will see that some sick or unhappy boy gets it."

Joel Pepper hopped out of his chair, upsetting

the mucilage bottle, seeing which, Gibson left her mistress to reach the table in time to save a disaster.

"Will you—will you?" he cried, running over to the sofa. "Will you give our things, if we make them, to some poor sick boys who are hurt, Mrs. Sterling?"

"I surely will, Joel," promised Mrs. Sterling, taking his two brown hands in her thin one.

"Then I'm going to make things," declared Joel, who never in his life before had been willing to sit still and cut out and snip and paste and write, and he plunged back to his seat. "Oh!" he cried, in dismay, and his face grew terribly red, "did I upset that?"—pointing to the mucilage bottle.

"You surely did," said Gibson tartly, and taking up the last of the sticky mess with a wet towel, "and I suppose you'll do it again, or some of the rest of you boys will. It don't make much difference which," and she moved off slowly.

"Gibson—Gibson," said Mrs. Sterling gently.

"Oh, Gibson!" Joel flew after her and twitched her apron string.

"What is it?" She turned on him with asperity.

"I never will upset the mucilage bottle again. I won't, Gibson, really."

"See that you don't," replied Gibson, moving off with small faith in such promises.

And another promise had that very evening been made, just before the boys had gathered in Mrs. Sterling's handsome sitting-room.

Curtis Park had been through several spasms of distress over his attack on Jack, when, whirling around from the friendly attitude he had chosen to assume, he had made a tirade on the grocer's son. Look at it whichever way he might, it didn't seem pleasant to view. And all the delight in the fire and the companionship of Mr. Dyce, of whom all the boys were exceedingly fond, was suddenly blotted out. He went home that night, and crept into bed, a most disconsolate boy.

"I was a beastly cad," he fumed, kicking the covering down to the foot, and rolling out with the vain attempt to find some diversion. But that being impossible, he tumbled in again, with his unhappy thoughts.

And all through the following days, go whichever way he might, there was the fact to stare him in the face, that he, Curtis Park, who had

hitherto prided himself upon his fine manners, had dropped from his height, to blackguard a boy, who, despite the fact of having been born the son of a little grocer on Common Street, had yet shown himself capable of the height.

"It's no use to deny it. I've been a bully and a cad," he groaned, and wiped the perspiration from his face. "What can I do!"

There was only one way, and he knew it, just as well at first as after all the fencing with himself that ensued the next few days. And at last on this very evening, he stopped fighting the idea, and marched up to what it suggested, like a man.

"See here, will you, though I shouldn't think you'd want to speak to me." It was a boy who said this to Jack standing on the step of the grocer's front door, next to the shop.

"Hey?" said Jack, in a great bewilderment. Was that really Curtis Park, whose rap on the door had announced him?

"Oh, it's no use to deny, Jack," said Curtis, speaking rapidly and desperately, "that I've been a cad—a mean, low cad—to talk to you in that way. It's done, and can't be helped now, only I want you to know what I think of it."

Jack swallowed hard. He was going to put

out his hand, but luckily thought in time, This is Curtis Park.

"I don't wonder you won't shake hands with me," said Curtis, who saw the movement. "I'm no end sorry; and perhaps sometime, Jack, why, you will."

Jack's brown hand shot out so swiftly it nearly knocked the other boy from the doorstep.

"It's all right," he said heartily.

"And you will never have another chance to call me a cad, I promise you," declared Curtis, wringing it. "Come on now, Jack"—hooking him by the arm—"it's time to go to Mrs. Sterling's; this is the evening, you know."

And the boys who had begun to think they had made a mistake in supposing that Curtis Park had taken a fancy to Jack Parish, were pushed back into their first conviction by seeing them come into the meeting of the Comfort committee arm in arm.

XXVII A PIECE OF GOOD NEWS

POLLY PEPPER ran down the steps of Miss Taylor's house, and set off at a lively pace on the pavement. Presently she came to an abrupt stop. "Oh, how could I forget, Mamsie wouldn't like me to run in the street," she thought remorsefully. And this took away some of the glad little thrills running over her.

When she got to Mrs. Cummings' very select boarding-house on the avenue, there was Miss Rhys at the window of her room, looking up from her embroidery. When she saw Polly Pepper, she smiled.

"Oh, it's you, Polly; I'm glad to see you."

"Is Alexia there?" called Polly, looking up, and feeling her lovely bit of news dancing within her again, so that she could hardly control her impatience. "Do tell her to come out, please, Miss Rhys."

"She isn't here. She went down-town." Miss Rhys laid her precious work in her lap, and

put her face close to the window screen. "Her candy wasn't a success, and she's gone down for more confectioner's sugar."

"Oh, dear me! exclaimed Polly, quite gone in distress over the failure of the candy, and feeling very helpless in the fact that there was no one to tell her news to, for of course Alexia must be the first one to hear it. "Which way did she go, Miss Rhys?"—lifting a troubled face to the window above.

"I don't know," said Miss Rhys absently, her mind on her embroidery, and very much wishing she could return to it. "She was going to your house, I know, for one thing, on her way down."

"Oh, she couldn't have gone there," cried Polly, "for I should have met her on the way."

"So you would," assented Alexia's aunt, wondering whether the bunch of grapes should be filled in solid, or worked with the mixed stitch that she had seen in a shop. "Well, then, I think on her way back she was going to see you, Polly."

"Then, I am going to run down and meet her," declared Polly, with a long breath. "Was it Pennsey's where she was going for the sugar, Miss Rhys?"—pausing a moment.

"Yes," said Miss Rhys, turning back with a

sigh of relief to her embroidery again, while Polly hurried off, wishing that she was a boy, when it would be quite proper for her to run through the streets.

"Oh, if it were only Badgertown!" she sighed to herself, thinking of the many happy runs she had enjoyed down the lane to Grandma Bascom's cottage, or over across the fields to the parsonage. "Dear me!"—when a voice, "Polly Pepper, Pol—ly Pepper!" called after her. She looked back, and there, with the window screen up, and her face thrust well forward, was Alexia's aunt, loudly summoning her.

When she saw that Polly heard, and had turned back, she beckoned smartly with her long fingers, on which shone, as Alexia had once said, "all the rings the Rhys family had ever owned," drew in her head, and waited till Polly came up under the window again.

"Oh, Polly, it's just this—how fortunate you hadn't gotten far. I want you to tell Alexia to get me some more green floss at Miss Angell's."

"Yes, Miss Rhys," said Polly, with a dismayed remembrance just how far it was to the little shop where the very latest patterns and materials for fancy work could be obtained, and the

first supper of the Cooking Club to be given to-night!

"And stay, Miss Angell may send me up some more patterns to choose from; that is, if she has had any new ones since I was there last week, and I presume that she has."

Polly could only utter, "Yes, Miss Rhys," so very faintly it could scarcely be heard. Dear me! and it was three o'clock already, and all that candy to be made over again!

She crept off on very dismal feet, till she reflected it wouldn't help matters any to lose heart, and so she set forward at a brisk pace again. Miss Rhys pushed down the window screen and set to work with a complacent smile at the prospect of having her errand performed so nicely.

"That's the good of having young people around," she said; "it's so convenient at times to get one's errands done."

Polly went the whole length of North Street to the great establishment of Pennsey's, where the avenue people traded. But search as she might, up one aisle and down another, there was no trace of Alexia; and inquiring of a clerk at the sugar department, if she had been there, he whipped his pencil out from behind his ear, and

picked up his order pad before he stopped to think.

"She's just gone," he said. "Yes, madam" —all attention to the next customer.

Polly hurried on rapid feet. It was half-past three by the big central clock as she went down the main aisle—well, she must hurry home, for Alexia was probably on her way there, as Miss Rhys had said, when, "Dear me, Polly Pepper, wait!" struck her ear.

She turned, and there before an opposite counter was Alexia, picking up her package of sugar and preparing to race after her.

"I'm getting some more nuts," she said; "my candy was perfectly horrid, and everything was spoiled."

"Yes, I know," said Polly, coming up close to comfort as much as possible, for Alexia had a very long face on, and looked as if it would take a good deal to cheer her up. "How can I tell her about that dreadful green floss and those patterns?" said Polly over and over to herself. "I must wait till we get out on the street."

But when the two girls were outside the shop, Polly carrying the bundle of nuts tucked under her arm, it was just as bad, and she put it off

until the corner was reached down which they must turn to go to Miss Angell's. And worst of all, they were hurrying on so fast the lovely bit of news must be postponed.

"How glad I am, Aunt didn't take it into her head to send me spinning off down there!" observed Alexia, glancing down the long thoroughfare with anything but a pleasant expression on her long face. "I just hate that Miss Angell's shop. Goodness me! we never could do it, with all this candy to make, and get our Club supper to-night."

Polly stopped short, and seized Alexia's arm. "Oh, don't feel badly!" she gasped, and then, thinking, "It's better to have the whole out at once," she finished in one breath, "Your aunt wants some green floss, Alexia."

"Well, she shan't have it," declared Alexia, stopping short, too, and glaring at Polly over her bundle of sugar. "No, indeed!" and her pale eyes grew very angry. "The very idea! she's always wanting green floss, every single minute. Come on, Polly Pepper." She set her face straight ahead and marched on. But not hearing Polly following, she looked over her shoulder, and then ran back. "Why don't you

come on? I shan't get that old green floss"— all in one breath.

"We can get there in a few minutes perhaps," said Polly, "Alexia, do let us hurry," and, turning down the corner, without so much as a glance backward, she went swiftly on, without trusting herself to look down the long street.

"I shan't get that old green floss," declared Alexia wrathfully, standing quite still on the corner, yet, as Polly kept steadily on, showing no intention of stopping, she pattered after. But she kept saying, every step of the way, "I shan't get that old green floss, Polly, *wait!*"

But it was not until the door of Miss Angell's shop was reached that the two girls came together.

"It's a hateful mean shame," exploded Alexia, huddling up her bundle of sugar passionately. "There, I've punched a hole with my thumb; see what you've made me do."

Polly turned around in dismay, to see a little trail of fine sugar drifting from the package down over Alexia's gown.

"Oh, dear me!" she exclaimed, in dismay. "I'll help you; stand still, Alexia, do; it's all running out."

"Well, you made me," cried Alexia, whirling around and wildly patting the bag in just the wrong places, so that the stream of sugar became now quite big.

"Do stand still, Alexia," implored Polly; "here, I'll pinch it up." She set down her bundle of nuts on the top step, which a lady, not seeing, came out of the shop, and promptly fell over.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Polly, in terror, and running down the steps. "Did you hurt you? Oh, I'm so sorry!"—clasping her hands and looking the picture of distress. Then she saw it was Mrs. Patterson, a friend of Auntie Whitney's.

"No," said the lady tartly, getting up to her feet to draw a long breath and gaze up and down the street. "Why, Polly Pepper!"—bringing her gaze upon the flushed face.

"Are you sure you are not hurt, Mrs. Patterson?" Polly looked at her anxiously. Oh, dear me! how could she be so careless!

"Not a bit of it," declared that lady, "but, oh, Polly, do you suppose any one saw me?" and she gazed ruefully up and down the street again.

"I don't believe any one did," said Polly, peering this way and that.

"Polly, do come; this sugar is all running away," cried Alexia loudly.

"And do let me brush your gown," implored Polly, feeling as if everything were going wrong this afternoon.

"Never mind, I'm going directly home, here is the carriage," said Mrs. Patterson, as her handsome equipage drew up. "Don't you worry a bit, Polly Pepper; I'm not in the least hurt," and off she drove.

"Polly, will you come?" called Alexia, dancing about impatiently on the top step, and clutching the bag of sugar with nervous fingers that didn't help matters any. "Oh, dear me, do look!"—pointing tragically to the little pile of sweetness at her feet.

"Oh, I do hope she wasn't hurt," cried Polly, stumbling up over the steps, how, she didn't know.

"Oh, that tiresome Mrs. Patterson! Well, it will do her good to tumble down once in a while," said Alexia unsympathetically, "she's so stiff and mighty; and I should think you might pay some attention to me," she cried, in a loud, injured

tone; "I'm all in a mess with this sugar, and I haven't got any candy, and you made me come clear down to this old shop, and——"

"Well, do come in," cried Polly, interrupting her stream of complaint, and, picking up the bag of nuts before any one else could tumble over it, she hurried Alexia into the little shop.

"And I'm glad enough to get where I can lay this old thing down," declared Alexia, dumping the bag of sugar upon the first resting-place she saw, an æsthetic little lounge, covered with elaborately embroidered pieces. "Oh, me! my arms are almost broken," and she stretched them restfully, "and beside, the sugar is 'most all run out."

"Oh, Alexia!" cried Polly, quite aghast, as she saw where Alexia had deposited the sugar, just as the proprietor of the shop hurried up with dismay written all over her countenance.

"Oh, my beautiful centerpieces!" she exclaimed, raising both hands in dismay, "I am sure they are quite, quite ruined."

"It's nothing but sugar," grumbled Alexia, as she huddled up her bundle again.

"And I'll brush it all off," said Polly anxiously, bestowing little pats over the various specimens

of fancy work. "See, Miss Angell, I don't believe it's hurt," she said, lifting her flushed face.

"Well, I don't wish them," declared two ladies together, coming back from the small table where they had gone to examine more work.

"They are quite mussed and tumbled now," added one, "and not at all what we want. Come, Sister," and she walked to the door, viewing with disfavor Alexia and her bundle, and Polly Pepper as well.

Miss Angell's face dropped to such a length that Polly couldn't bear to look at it.

"Oh, please don't go," cried Polly, flying after the irate customer; "I don't really believe the pretty things are hurt. Do just come back and see, please."

The other lady was standing irresolutely by the lounge, but she wouldn't even look at the centerpieces that Miss Angell was smoothing out with a despairing hand, preparing to put them into their boxes again.

"It was clean sugar," Polly ran on, feeling quite sure if she stopped talking, that all hope was lost.

"But they are mussed," began the lady by the door, very decidedly.

Alexia was huddling up her bundle quite gone in despair, and lost to all the distress of having no candy to take to the Cooking Club supper. If those two ladies would only buy the centerpieces they had selected, it was all she hoped for in this world.

"No, indeed! Come, Sister!" and she opened the door. "Why, Mrs. Alexander!"

Mrs. Alexander, a portly person, with a great deal of black jet and lace, that seemed to be always catching in the apparel of those who passed her, worked her way into the small shop, and up past the knot of people, giving friendly nods of recognition on her way.

"How d'ye do, Miss Ellicott, Miss Juliana. How are you, Polly? And, Alexia, how is your aunt?" And without waiting for a reply, she sprang, if such a ponderous body could be said to spring, at the box of centerpieces Miss Angell was packing away. "Oh, oh! how beautiful! Stop"—laying her large hand on one. "Just what I want. How much is it?"

"Fifteen dollars," said Miss Angell, whipping it neatly out of the box, her dismal frown becoming an expansive smile. "Yes, it is a beauty —one of the very latest things," and she spread

it forth on the lounge with an experienced little flourish.

Miss Ellicott deserted the door and hurried over to the lounge. "I'll—I'll"—as she tried to work herself in between. But the portly Mrs. Alexander had no idea of being interrupted at such an important crisis in life when centerpieces were to be decided upon, so she loudly kept on in her bargaining. "I'll take it," she said, in her most decided fashion. "And the next one, too, I fancy; let me see that."

"But that is," gasped Miss Juliana, threading her way into the group, "the very one that I liked."

"Eh?" said Mrs. Alexander, looking up with the acute eyes of a bargain-hunter. "Oh, I don't wonder you like it; it's a beauty. Yes, I'll take it also. How much did you say it was, Miss Angell?"

Miss Angell, who hadn't said, saw no reason why she shouldn't now make it any price that appealed to her better judgment.

"Twenty dollars," she answered, clapping on a cool third of its price, and Mrs. Alexander, who cared very little what she paid for it, beamed at her, and said:

"Put them in a box and send it out to my carriage; they are the handsomest things I've seen for a long time, and so wonderfully cheap! You are quite right; they are beauties."

"If you'd done as I wanted you to," cried Miss Juliana, the tears of vexation gathering in her eyes, as she saw the now incomparable bits of fancy work borne off before their very faces, "you wouldn't have stopped for such a trifle as a few crumbs of sugar, Sister."

Miss Ellicott's face was very red, but she knew better than to show the chagrin she felt, to add to the delight of the purchaser over her bargain, so she contented herself with saying, as she stalked to the door:

"You said you didn't want them, Juliana, the same as I did."

"But I wasn't so set about it," said Miss Juliana, with a regretful glance at the box, now gayly tied up by the jubilant Miss Angell and delivered into the hands of the little errand-girl to be given to the Alexander footman, "and I'm sure if you hadn't insisted, I should have seen that they weren't hurt."

"Well, do come on now, Juliana," said her sister sharply, in all the anguish of having the

whole blame deposited upon her person. "Since the things are gone, what is the use of talking about the matter?"—as they disappeared out of the shop.

Polly and Alexia, therefore, had to wait for all this confusion and excitement to clear away, before the green floss could be bought and the message from Miss Rhys as to the patterns could be given. Meanwhile, Polly was tying up the package of sugar, and patting the shrunken paper bag into shape over the hole.

"You tell your aunt," said Miss Angell, her cheeks quite flushed with elation over her good bargain, "that I haven't any more patterns come in since she was here. Yes, Mrs. Alexander"—to that lady, with her head over a drawer, deep in a hunt for more bargains—"there are some exquisite designs among those. There's the floss"—bunching it up hurriedly into a wad, and speaking all in one breath. "Would you mind, Miss Alexia, doing this up yourself?"—pointing to the white tissue paper on the table.

Alexia, who didn't mind anything so long as she could get out of the shop, twisted up the floss into a wad of the paper.

"Do hurry, Polly," she cried, and scampered

out to the street, Polly following with her bag of nuts.

"Oh, dear! I've forgotten that tiresome old bundle of sugar after all," she cried, prancing back.

"I'll carry it, and you take the nuts," said Polly, cramming her bundle into the long arms and getting anxious fingers on the bag of sugar, as Alexia came running up with it.

"I'm sure I wish you would," said Alexia, seizing the nuts delightedly. "I just hate that old—Polly Pepper, it's four o'clock!"—as the church bell on St. Stephen's tower pealed out.

So Polly didn't have a chance, after all, to tell her glad piece of news, until they were at the Club supper, which was to be given at Larry Keep's to celebrate his getting well.

"Oh, Alexia," she was guilty of whispering, "it's the most splendid thing."

"Isn't it!" cried Alexia, in the greatest satisfaction. "To think I got it done after all our fright! And it's the best candy I ever made"—glancing over the room, where the dish was being passed about eagerly.

"Yes, I know," said Polly carelessly, "but this is much better than candy, Alexia, that I mean."

"Much better than candy!" echoed Alexia, laying down the slice of sponge cake that Clem had made, on her plate, and peering around into Polly's face. "What do you mean, Polly Pepper? There can't anything possibly be better than candy."

"Yes, there can," contradicted Polly, twisting in delight on her chair, "and you'll say so when you hear it. It's the most beautiful thing that could possibly have happened, Alexia Rhys. It's "—and just then the door opened and in walked Miss Mary Taylor and Mr. Hamilton Dyce, and the first glance that Alexia took of their faces, she guessed the whole thing.

"Polly!" she gasped, seizing Polly's arm, "you don't mean that our Miss Mary is going to marry Mr. Dyce?"

"Yes, I do," said Polly happily, "mean just that very thing, Alexia."

"I don't believe it," declared Alexia, while all the time she knew it was true by their radiant faces.

"Well, it is true, as true can be," said Polly, "for she told me so this very afternoon at her house."

"And you've known it all this time," cried

Alexia, for the first time in her life in a passion at Polly, "and never told me at all!"

"Oh, Alexia, how could I?" cried Polly, in an aggrieved little voice; "for we were in such a perfectly dreadful scrape over getting ready for the supper! How could I, Alexia?" She turned such a miserable face that Alexia made haste to say:

"You couldn't, you sweet thing, you!" and gave her a reassuring hug.

"Well, just look at Mr. Dyce, and hear him laugh!"

And Mr. Hamilton Dyce being unable to keep his delight within bounds, and seeming to think it incumbent upon himself to take the young people into his confidence, just coolly announced it. And then there was no more paying attention to the cakes, and the little biscuits, the custards, and the whipped cream; and even Alexia's nut candy went begging.

And Miss Mary had to sit in the center of each group of boys and girls, a few minutes at a time, for the supper was passed around on trays, till Mr. Dyce said he wished he hadn't told the news until the feast was ended. And after that, when they all finished up the evening fes-

tivities with a dance, why, every one there, tried to get her for first partner. But it was Alexia who swept them all one side.

"She's my Sunday-school teacher," she declared, "and I shall have her first."

"Well, so she is our Sunday-school teacher," cried half a dozen of the girls at once, as they crowded up.

"Well, she's my very dearest friend—that is, except Polly Pepper," said Alexia positively. "Come, Miss Mary"—hanging obstinately to her hand, on which shone a new ring with a big, bright gem in it.

"Well, you said Miss Salisbury was," Pickering Dodge, on the fringe of the circle of girls, couldn't help saying.

"Oh, well, I mean Miss Mary is my very dearest friend after that," said Alexia coolly, tossing him a saucy glance, as she bore off her beloved Sunday-school teacher down the whole length of Mrs. Keep's drawing-room floor.

XXVIII THE LITTLE STONE CUPBOARD

PHRONSIE ran down the hall.

"Oh, Mamsie!" she cried, hurrying into Mrs. Fisher's room, "Grandpapa says she is coming—she really is!" She clasped her hands and stood quite still in front of her mother.

"Who, dear?" asked Mrs. Fisher absently. She was standing over by the window, with one of Phronsie's pinafores in her hand and wondering if any more were needed to carry her through the summer.

"She really is, Mamsie," said Phronsie, very much disappointed that her mother didn't seem to notice. Then her mouth drooped, and she gave a long sigh.

Mrs. Fisher tore her mind off from the pinafores and looked down quickly.

"Well, I declare, child;" and she took her in her arms. "Now, then!" She put the pinafore in a chair, and herself in another; then she

drew Phronsie into her lap. "Tell Mother all about it," she said.

"Yes," said Phronsie, "I will"—snuggling in great satisfaction up against her mother's neck: "you see, my little girl is really coming; Grandpapa said so."

"Oh, yes—Rachel."

"Yes." Phronsie bobbed her yellow head; then took it up from its resting-place in her mother's neck, to peer up into the face above. "And she'll be my little girl all the time she is here, and I must get Clorinda fixed this very minute," she added, dreadfully excited. And, her news all told, Phronsie clambered down from Mrs. Fisher's lap and scurried off.

And in a few minutes everybody knew all over the house that the letter had come, in which the invitation for Rachel's visit had been accepted by Miss Parrott. Moreover, she was to arrive on the following day.

"Whoopity-la!" sang Joel, who very much liked Rachel, for she was always ready to play anything that he proposed, and was a perfect adept in climbing trees and inventing a circus out of small material; "now that's just prime! I wish she was coming to-day."

Van and Percy, just as well pleased, ran hither and yon, very much excited.

"What shall we do to show her we are glad she's coming?" asked Percy, who seized every chance that offered itself to celebrate such events.

"Why, she'll see it," said Joel, pounding away lustily. He was mending his tennis racket. "Whickets! I 'most split that"—holding it up ruefully.

"Mrs. Fisher told you not to say that," cried Van, who dearly loved to bring Joel up for correction.

"Well, I didn't mean——" Joel whirled around on him, "And I guess you'd say it if you'd 'most split your racket, so!"

"She told you not to," repeated Van, knowing his power in holding to that simple statement.

"Well, I didn't mean to, I tell you," cried Joel loudly, and very red in the face.

"And she won't like it," said Van, delighted to see the effect of his words.

Joel's face worked, and he flung the broken racket across the room. It fell with a crash; and he ran over to the bed, hopped into the middle

of it, and buried his face in his brown hands, his shoulders in distress.

"I didn't mean—go away," he screamed, kicking as hard as he could.

Van, terribly frightened at the storm he had raised, stood perfectly still in the middle of the room.

"There, now, I hope you're satisfied," said Percy, from the other side. "See what you've done. I guess you'll catch it, Van Whitney," he added pleasantly.

Van, not so much worried over what he would catch as terrified about Joel, ran over to his brother.

"Oh, do stop him," he implored, seizing Percy's hand.

"I can't stop him," said Percy; "you know yourself it's silly to ask me that."

"I must, then," cried Van, scurrying over to the foot of the bed. "Joel, do stop," he begged frantically.

"Go away!" screamed Joel, kicking lustily. "I didn't mean to say it. Oh, dear me! Mamsie—Mamsie!" he blubbered, rolling from side to side on the neat, white bed.

"I guess he's going to have a fit," said Percy

cheerfully, coming up to view matters at a safe distance from the flying feet.

At this, Van's distress knew no bounds, and, regardless of all possible danger to himself, he ran around the bed and flung himself upon it, to burrow close to Joel's stubby black head.

"Joe, don't," he cried, bursting into tears and hugging him with both frantic arms.

Joel wriggled and screamed, "Go away!" and kicked more than ever, but Van held on sturdily, and together the two boys rolled over and over across the bed, back and forth, till their breath gave out.

"Oh, just look what you are doing," exclaimed Percy, prancing up and down the room. He had started two or three times to run out and call Mrs. Fisher; then thought better of it. "You've mussed the bedspread all up; and only look at those shams!"—hanging over the footboard in extreme dismay.

Hearing these last words, both boys rolled apart and thrust up their heads, to gaze at the details in question. There they were, spick and span as usual at the top, but the lower parts were all mussed and wrinkled, while the lace at one end hung down in a small tag.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Joel, huddling up to Van, to throw his arm around his neck, "just see what I've done!"

"Oh, you didn't do it; I did," said Van, giving Joel an affectionate squeeze. "It was all my fault."

"No such thing," declared Joel sturdily; "if you say so again, I'll fight you."

"And perhaps you can straighten that lace," suggested Percy, with no relish for any further hostilities.

Van and Joel drew off to the foot of the bed, and huddled up there to regard his efforts, as he ran around to the pillows, patting and smoothing them straight.

"That won't do any good," said Joel, in great disfavor; "you can't make the lace whole again."

Van sorrowfully embraced his knees, his feet tucked up under him.

"Oh, what will Jane say?" he breathed fearfully.

"Jane? I don't care for her," said Joel scornfully. "It's Mamsie," and he swallowed hard.

"Perhaps she won't care," cried Van, leaving his knees to take care of themselves, in alarm lest Joel was going off again.

"And just see how you've mussed up the bedspread," Percy couldn't help saying, to relieve his chagrin over the failure to make the pillow shams look nicely, and he drew off and pointed to it tragically. "It looks as if—crocodiles had been all over it," he declared, hunting for the worst thing he could think of.

Joel and Van rolled fearful eyes all over the bed.

"I'm going to Mamsie!" was all Joel said, as he rolled over the edge and disappeared from the room.

"Oh, wait," screamed Van. Then he rolled off his side of the bed, took two big steps, and stood quite still in the middle of the floor.

"You've got to go with him and help tell," said Percy pleasantly, as if proposing the most delightful thing. But Van didn't stir.

"Aren't you ashamed!" cried Percy, with a sniff. "I'd like to know if Polly will think it's nice for you to sneak out of it, Van Whitney."

"Ow!" squealed Van. He shot out into the hall, and without giving himself time to think, ran as hard as he could to join Joel in Mother Fisher's room.

Left to himself, Percy set himself to work on

straightening the bedspread, running around from one side to the other to pat and twitch impatiently.

"As soon as I get one side nice, it all comes away from the other," he said to himself. "How in the world does Jane ever make a bed, I wonder?" And at last he deserted it altogether and drew off with a very hot face. "Heigh-ho! I wish we could do something to celebrate when Rachel comes," and he wrinkled his brows in perplexity. "Oh, I know," and he clapped his hands in glee. Then he ran softly out and up to Ben's room.

But Ben wasn't in; so Percy, nearly bursting with a plan that now seemed to him very grand, was obliged to take some one else into his confidence. And that one happened to be old Mr. King, whom he met as he came downstairs with a very rueful countenance.

"What's the matter, Percy?" asked the old gentleman, with a keen glance.

"Nothing, Grandpapa," said Percy dismally.

"Goodness me! Do you carry about such a face as that for nothing?" cried the old gentleman, with a laugh. "You look as if you'd something on your mind, my boy."

"Well, I have, Grandpapa," said Percy, now driven into a corner, and looking up at last.

"Best have it out then," said Grandpapa firmly, taking one of Percy's hands, and they went on to the writing-room.

"There, now, here is just the place for a boy to get things that are unpleasant off his mind, I take it," he said, closing the door on them both. "Sit down and tell me what is troubling you, Percy."

"Can't I stand up, Grandpapa?" asked Percy, over by the table.

"To be sure," laughed Grandpapa; "stand up or sit down, just as you choose. Only let us get at this bugaboo that is worrying you, my boy. Out with it."

"It isn't a bugaboo," said Percy, with open eyes; "it's a plan, Grandpapa. Only I can't find Ben," and he began to be dismal once more. "Dear me! where can he be!"

"Oh, it's a plan, is it?" said Grandpapa, vastly relieved. "Well, well!" Then he began to laugh. "And so you wanted Ben to help you with it, eh?"

"Yes, Grandpapa," said Percy, his happiness returning, and he deserted the table and ran up to

the old gentleman's side. "You see, Rachel is coming."

"Yes, she is," said old Mr. King, with a satisfied nod, "and you like it, I hope, my boy." He looked up with a keen glance.

"Awfully," said Percy, great satisfaction settling over his face.

"Well, I think all of us like the plan," remarked the old gentleman, in extreme complacency at achieving the visit, "for she's a very nice girl, Rachel is, it appears to me."

"She's awfully good fun," said Percy, "only Joel will make her play with him all the time, I suppose," and his face fell.

"Oh, you must cut Joe out," said old Mr. King, laughing heartily.

"I can't," said Percy dismally; "we can't any of us, Grandpapa," and he opened his blue eyes very wide at the mere thought.

"Well, yes, I think we are all pleased, very much pleased indeed that Rachel is coming," repeated old Mr. King, going back to the expected visit, "and, as she comes to-morrow——"

"To-morrow!" echoed Percy, aghast, "why, then I can't get up my surprise, Grandpapa." For, strange to say, the time of the arrival had

slipped from his mind. The old gentleman hastened to comfort him.

"Suppose you tell me the grand plan," he said at last; "then we'll see if there won't be time enough."

"Oh, I was going to get Ben to take me out into the woods to-morrow," said Percy, feeling as if he should very much like to cry, he was so disappointed, "and we could have dug up some cunning little plants and ferns: Rachel said she liked them at the garden party. We could have planted them in a box, and 'twould have been so nice, and now it's too late." And, overcome with despair, he sat down on the first thing he could find, which was a pile of books on the floor.

"Take care," warned Grandpapa, but over Percy had gone, the books flying all ways under him.

"I'll pick them up," he cried, when he could get his breath.

"I am glad you are not hurt," said Grandpapa King, with a rueful glance at the big reference volumes, only laid out for his use that morning, which certainly wouldn't be improved by their fall. "Here, wait a bit, and I'll help

you, Percy, my boy," and he got out of his chair.

"Oh, I can do it; let me, Grandpapa; let me do it alone," begged Percy, tugging at the books and piling as rapidly as he could, for they were quite heavy. "There, see, they're almost back again"—as he staggered up with the last one.

"Not quite so fast," said Grandpapa King, lending his hand to the task. "Now next time when you want to sit down, I advise you to take a chair, Percy, my boy. Well, now, let us think how you can get up a nice little surprise for Rachel when she comes to-morrow."

"And nobody must know it," cried Percy, quite enchanted at the prospect of having a secret plan with Grandpapa. "Oh, you won't tell anybody but me, will you?" He crowded in between the old gentleman's chair and the big table, and regarded him anxiously.

"No, indeed," cried old Mr. King, in his most emphatic way, and bringing his hand heavily down on the table; "not a single person shall hear about it. This is your and my secret, Percy, my boy."

And outside, in a slope of the terrace where it

ran down to a tangle of greenery, were Phronsie and little Dick. And they were making great preparations, too, for Rachel's visit on the following day. The great task before them was nothing more nor less than to set up their little stone house in the boulders under the big apple tree.

"I'm going to set up the cupboard," announced little Dick.

"Wait for me, do," begged Phronsie, who was busy in putting the little acorn cups and saucers in fine array on the big, flat stone that served them as a table.

"Well, do hurry, then," said Dick, his fingers twitching to be at their work, "for it's just full of everything." He had pulled out the stone from a hole between the boulders, which, running in quite deeply, had served as a convenient receptacle for certain treasures and accumulations, and was therefore called the cupboard. "We haven't cleaned it out in ever 'n' ever so long, Phronsie."

"Yes, I will hurry," said Phronsie, gently putting the little acorn she held back into its cup. She had a soft little bit of cloth in her hand, with which she first wiped each piece.

"I'm almost through; I haven't but one, two, 'leven more to do."

"Oh, I'll help you," cried Dick, "wash up the dishes," and he turned his back on the cupboard. "Where's another towel?"

"You mustn't break them," said Phronsie gravely, handing him another small portion of cloth, "because you see they're *very* nice dishes" —and she went back to her own polishing.

"I won't break them," promised little Dick, beginning on an acorn saucer.

"Chil—dren"—it was Polly's voice—"oh, where are you?" They could hear her as she sped over the terrace.

Down went the little dish-towels, and over went all the cups and saucers, for Dickie's foot knocked off what Phronsie spared, as both the small housekeepers rushed tumultuously out.

"Oh, here we are, Polly," they cried.

"Well, you must come at once if you want to go down to Candace's," she announced, standing on the terrace-top, her cheeks quite rosy for her run after them. "Auntie is going to take Jasper and me down to get some things for Rachel. Do you want to go too?"

Didn't they! Polly laughed to see them

clamber along the green bank, and she put out her hands and drew them up.

"I shall buy Rachel something," announced Phronsie, smoothing down her pink frock with great decision, as they reached the top.

"And so shall I," cried little Dick, bobbing his head; "I shall get her the very nicest thing that Candace has."

"Well, now, children, we must hurry," said Polly, as they all ran along, "because you know we ought not to keep Auntie waiting. Now, then, one, two, three, and away!"

She seized a small hand in each of her own, and away they sped. None too soon, for Jasper was just skipping down to meet them with the announcement that sister Marion was getting into the carriage; and there on the steps was Mrs. Fisher, with Phronsie's hat in her hand.

"Get in, young man," said Jasper, cramming Dick's cap on his head, and he bundled him in unceremoniously, then hopped after himself.

"I'm going to buy my little girl something," announced Phronsie, looking back where Mamsie still stood upon the step.

"Yes, yes," she said smilingly, as Thomas started up the horses.

"Wait, wait," cried Phronsie, in a tone of great distress, and she leaned out toward Mamsie.

"What is it, child?" said Mrs. Fisher.

And, "Wait a bit, Thomas," called Jasper.

"What's the matter, Phronsie?" asked Polly, leaning over from the opposite seat, where she was ensconced with Mrs. Whitney.

"I want my little purse," said Phronsie, looking down at her empty hands, then up at her in grave reproach.

"Oh, Phronsie, you can take some of my money," began Polly. "We needn't wait for that, need we, Mamsie?" she cried, wrinkling up her forehead impatiently.

"I want my own little purse," said Phronsie decidedly.

"Yes, Mamsie will get it," said Mrs. Fisher; "that is, if Mrs. Whitney can wait." She cast a glance over Polly into the pleasant face above.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Whitney, with a cheery smile; "I think Phronsie had much better have her own little purse."

"And I want my own purse, too," declared little Dick, struggling to get down from the seat where he was wedged in with Jasper and Phron-

sie. "Mine is big like a man's," he added, with great importance.

"Dear me!" Mrs. Whitney burst into a merry laugh. "Mrs. Fisher, do you think you could be troubled enough to get Dicky boy's purse, too?" she asked.

"I don't find it any trouble," said Mrs. Fisher, with another laugh, "to get them both." So Phronsie's little purse, with a chain to hang on her arm, and Dick's bigger one, that folded like a pocketbook, were both handed into the carriage, Thomas cracked the whip, and off they went to see Candace in her little shop on Temple Place.

The next day but one, Rachel was visiting in the little stone house among the boulders. Phronsie had carefully explained how the reason that the cups and saucers were all on the ground and the dish-towels thrown carelessly aside, was that they had gone away with Auntie, who couldn't be kept waiting.

"Well, let's wash 'em up now," said Rachel, flying for one of the diminutive dish-towels.

"I'm going to clean out the cupboard," declared little Dick, going back to his original purpose.

"Let us do the cups and saucers first," said Phronsie, with gentle determination, setting down Clorinda on a stone seat next to Rachel's doll, and carefully smoothing out her dress.

"No, I want to do the cupboard," persisted little Dick, with strange obstinacy, for he was generally quite willing to give up to Phronsie.

"I tell you, Phronsie," broke in Rachel suddenly: "let's all set up the cupboard first, and then it will be ready to put the clean dishes into. That's the best way."

"Oh, let us," said Phronsie, easily pleased, and giving a last pat to Rachel's doll. So she ran over to join the others, and, getting down on her knees, she began to fumble within the little cupboard. Dick had already opened the door, which was accomplished by taking away the stone.

"Now you take out one thing, Phronsie, and I'll take out the next," said little Dick, crowding up as close as he could get.

"And then I'll take the things," said Rachel, sitting down a little distance off, between the two, "as you hand 'em out; so we'll all clean out the cupboard. Hullo! what's this?"—as Phronsie handed out the first article.

"That's a top," said little Dick, looking back at her.

"A top!" cried Rachel in derision. "Why, it won't spin; not a bit in this world."

"It would before it was broken," said Phronsie, for Dick had his face pressed close to the door of the cupboard, while his brown fingers were prowling about its interior.

"Dear me! why don't you throw it away?" cried Rachel. "An old broken thing like that 's no good."

"Oh, we wouldn't ever throw it away, Rachel," said Phronsie, in alarm. "That's our dear top, and it used to spin beautifully," and she took it affectionately out of Rachel's hand.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Rachel. "Well, what's the next thing?"—as little Dick backed away from the cupboard. "What is it?"—as he placed some article in her hand.

"They're a pair of her doll's eyes," said little Dick.

"Oh, misery me!" cried Rachel, tumbling backward, the pair of eyes in her hand. "Why don't you have 'em put back in your doll, Phronsie?"

"Because these are broken," said Phronsie,

hanging on to the top with one hand, while she reached out the other, "and Grandpapa took my child down and got her new eyes."

"Well, what makes you save these?" said Rachel, sitting straight again; "they're no use, Phronsie, now they're broken. Throw them away, do."

"No, no," protested Phronsie, holding the pair of eyes very closely in her warm little palm, "they were my child's; I'm going to keep them always."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Rachel faintly, "you'll never set up your cupboard if you're going to put everything back again the same as it was. Well, pull out the next thing, Phronsie; it's your turn."

So Phronsie set her two treasures down in a niche in the big boulder, and leaned over the door of the cupboard.

"I'm going clear back," she announced, running her fat little arm as far as it would go, to bring it out with something round in the middle of her palm.

"What is it?" asked Rachel curiously. "Whatever in all this world, Phronsie?"—at the queer little wad in Phronsie's hand.

"Oh, that?" said little Dick, before Phronsie could answer; "that's what the squirrel gave us, a lo—ong time ago, Rachel."

"The squirrel gave you?" she cried. "I suppose it's a nut," she added carelessly.

"No, 'tisn't a nut," said Phronsie, still keeping it in her hand, and shaking her head decidedly, "and he was a naughty squirrel; he was in a bird's nest."

"In a bird's nest? What do you mean, and how could you see him?" demanded Rachel, all three questions in one breath.

"We looked up," said little Dick, throwing his head back to illustrate his speech, "and he was right there"—pointing up to the highest branches of the apple tree—"way up on top."

"And the poor bird was screaming," said Phronsie, snuggling up to Rachel's side, but still not offering to give up the little green wad. "Poor little bird!—she made a new house," she added sorrowfully.

"And the naughty squirrel was pulling out all the things in her house," said little Dick, breaking in with gusto, "and flinging them down; and he threw us this. Show her, Phronsie."

So Phronsie opened her hand and held it up, the little green wad in the center.

"Oh, isn't it funny!" Rachel was going to say. Instead, she seized it, twitched it apart, and hopped up to her feet; then, deserting the two children, ran like lightning up the green bank, two torn bits of paper fluttering in her hand. And not observing where she went, she ran directly into old Mr. King taking a constitutional on the lawn.

"Bless me! what is it?" he gasped, putting out a strong hand to save her from a fall.

"It's the *ten-dollar bill!*" panted Rachel. "Don't you see?"—waving it at him.

THE END